Good afternoon and thanks for joining us. I'm Judy Simpson. The flood waters of Irene swept away everything from roads and bridges to cars and homes. As Vermonters continue to clean up, they are finding that the flood also damaged family treasures and important documents. Things like photographs, paintings, and heirlooms; quilts and antiques. The good news is that many of those personal or sentimental items can be salvaged in some way. As part of our program, we called on experts who will demonstrate specific techniques to help conserve family treasures. We will get to those demonstrations in just a few moments, but first, I'll introduce our guests and talk a little bit about disaster and emergency preparation. Joining me are the curator of the Vermont historical society, Jackie Calder, and Mary Jo Davis, who is a paper conservator and preventative conservation specialist. Thank you both for being with us today. How did each of you get involved with some urgency preparedness and response? Jackie, you can start.

Jackie: I guess it really came to the forefront of my personal experience in 1992. I went through the flood in Montpelier when they had the ice jam—a very local event—and the basement of the pavilion where the collections of the historical society were stored had about 6 inches of water in them so it was a very scary experience. We didn’t lose anything and we were very lucky. After that, M.J. had been working at the Vermont museum and gallery a Lions and she’d been really pushing training museum professionals to get together to do some emergency training so I’ve been working with her ever since.

M.J.: In 2000 and I was working with my professional organization, the American institute for conservation. They had a nationwide program to choose 10 people that they wanted to have of train the trainer kind of program. I was chosen to do that and a colleague and I did training as a result of that training at the north east a document conservation center for 15 museum professionals in New England. I said we should do this in Vermont so I contacted Jackie and we did it in 2004 put together a loosely formed emergency response team. We did train and got some pies so everybody has their personal protection equipment known as PPE then we continued to try and stay in touch and do something at least a yearly basis. Jackie do you want to talk about alliance for response?

Jackie: Alliance for response is a national initiative that under the sponsorship of heritage preservation in Washington, DC. They realize that you can go through an emergency but if the emergency responders did not know you exist then you're out there in the cold when you could be helping. So they started the program usually citywide but in Vermont, we’re statewide organization and we melded together. Vermont Alliance for response brings together cultural heritage emergency people who have trained and emergency response and we try to work with first responders.

Judy: Irene is still on everyone’s mind, but historically there have been a lot of different types of emergencies that occur in Vermont.
Jackie.: I think all of us have experience them. One of the things that you learn when you go through training and anyone who's gone through an emergency like this is all emergencies are local. Sometimes they're very personal but here in Vermont it's usually water flood. Whether it's a broken pipe or something that is as extreme as Irene or in the wintertime it's freezing ice and snow. Those are the things you really need to be prepared for in Vermont. Then the other major emergency across the world goes through his fire.

Judy.: What are the things Jackie that people can do to best prepare for an emergency situation?

Jackie.: I think just talk about it especially in your family if you can get something Vermont emergency management has a workbook that they put out and you can get that from their website VEMVT.Org. If you go through this with your family it has a checklist and just start thinking about it. What would happen if there was a fire in the house where are you going to go. If there is a flood what we do when we want to get out of the house first who do we call. I think it is really important to have your call list in order and if possible have a written down. I know when I go through stressful situations trying to look up numbers or call. 411 may not be available right away but have those lists available and have everyone know where they are.

Judy.: Be organized.

Jackie.: Be organized and just be thinking about it. We know people are really under a lot of stress and trying to make decisions in the middle of an emergency is very hard so if you've already made some of those decisions I had a time or thought them through and makes a big difference.

Judy.: Mary Jo what about family valuables and heirlooms?

Mary Joe.: I guess the most important thing is to have them in a safe place to start with. People very often will defer to the basement or the attic for these types of sorts locations and they're just not good. Something is going to get wet bottom line. If it's in the attic or the basement. Family documents photographs heirlooms these kinds of things can be saved it's just a matter of getting them stabilized after an event occurs. If you've had a fire and things get burned up you can save gone but if things are wet muddy they may look for a bull but you may be able to get back some semblance of the original object. You have to be willing to understand that you are not going to get back how it was prior to the event but it might be about 80% OK.

Jackie.: Or you might get back to a point with photographs were documents that you can get the information. In this digital age you can make copies of photographs or from the original you can probably do some digital recreation.

Judy.: So where does someone start with this overwhelming task of going through a flood fire or some sort of disaster?

Mary Joe.: I think the initial place is to first of all think about your life safety issues. That's first and foremost is my family safe here? Is my home compromised? Asking those kinds of questions first of all before you think about going in to salvage any kind of family photographs or a wedding dress or a piece of furniture. It’s most important to be concerned about your safety in yourself.

Judy.: Jackie what local resources do we have in place to help family treasures?

Jackie.: I'd recommend this the Vermont emergency management.gov you can get this online downloaded as a .pdf or they will send you a copy of it. Again online heritage preservation.org. As part of their website they have a family response dealing with your own collections and they have books available about taking care of what might be your own family treasures.
Judy.: We're going to give a demonstration of some specific things you can do to salad your possessions and for that were going to move over to our kitchen counter where we have a little bit more room to demonstrate. We're here at the counter Mary Jo and Jackie have set up some basic equipment for the demonstrations. Mary Jo what comes first?

Mary Joe.: First comes personal safety. I mentioned personal protection equipment known as PPE and this is a face mask. It's an N95 is the number you want to get. It's available in your hardware store and you want to mask that have two straps so that will be really held closely to your head and keep the particulates out. A couple different types of eye protection certainly for impact or if you are in fact dealing with a moldy situation. You might want to use flash cobbles like this. For your hands these are nitrile gloves. You could also get a heavy hardware glove like this that you could get at the hardware store. These are all things that you could get the hardware store.

Jackie.: Sometimes people have them and home because their painting or doing things like that but in the situations were primarily talking about old growth. Sometimes it does not seem bad when you're working with it but you really do need to take these precautions.

Judy.: Okay.

Mary Joe.: With the example of Irene the water was a toxic soup so you really do need to protect herself rinsing and cleaning yourself after you get out of a situation like that so that you're not contaminating your home as well. The first thing for example a book. If this were wet and filthy but closed don't pick it up and try rinse it out because then you just going to drive the dirt into the book structure itself. We would pick this up and if this was a clean is simply put it in this way so that when you pull the book out of the water the water drains down not into the text block. This is a good group effort here. You would take the next book dog and then Jackie what she's going to be doing is this is plain old wax paper. You could use parchmen paper. You could use even clean news print. Whenever you can get just wrap it.

Judy.: Don't you want to dry it?

Mary Joe.: This is where we have a couple of options. You can put this in the freezer now like this and freeze it. It's off your plate you don't have to worry about it it buys you time and is not going to get moldy. If you have the time saves us a smaller event as smaller disaster then you can in fact air dry which would involve standing the book up and fanning out. It might take several days but that would be your next step.

Jackie.: And of course if you're planning ahead of time and you had lots of books you may not be able to get to all of them but maybe you want to choose the ones that are most important to you.

Judy.: Clean them and then put them in the freezer until you're ready to deal with drying them out.

Mary Joe.: Yes. When you have time and your little bit more relaxed. Now for family photographs you can very easily rents these off. They are actually quite sturdy it's amazing. They can be in water up 36-48 hours almost and you won't lose the image or the emulsion. So if you have again Jackie mentioned priorities is really true you might not take snaps that you have duplicates of but the family photographs. I have a piece of Plexiglas here in between and you would hold it gently like this and if it had a lot a mud on it as you did in Irene then you could just pour and gently move the debris off of the photograph like that. These little foam brushes are from a hardware store and they're great for this kind of thing.

Judy.: And they're pretty inexpensive two which is nice.
Mary Joe.: They are. Then you can take your photograph and if you had a clothesline setup you could clip it with a clothespin here or you can make a rack of them lying down there to air dry.

Judy.: Once again this is just screen there's setting these down on.

Mary Joe.: Write well we have a couple options for drying. One this is egg crate it's called you get it at the hardware store in 2 foot by 4 foot sheets it's what goes up into the fluorescent light fixtures. It's great support for carrying things but also you can use it to put things on to try them out.

Judy.: What about fabrics.

Mary Joe.: Fabrics the problem with textiles is their non-supporting. You need a body in the actual fabric if we have an older like a wedding dress the fabric is probably week anyway. Water and mud are going to add a ton away to this so picking it up you might actually tear the garment so this way taken hold towel or sheet and gently roll it onto the towel and Jackie you can roll that up. Then what happens when you use the towel that owl will wake out some of the moisture and it gives you something they carry it with so it's a great way to move things. Then you can bring it over to your drying screen and let it dry out that way.

Jackie.: Another screen you can use are your storm windows that usually have screens. You can use those but one thing you want to remember is sometimes those are metal and you want to be careful about rust. It can be initial if you have a barrier between it or if you use nylon screen that's the best.

Judy.: We're just about out of time the Jackie if someone wants more information about the Vermont cultural heritage and our recovery team what should they do?

Jackie.: They can contact me at the Vermont historical society. My e-mail is Jackie.calder @ state.VT.us.

Judy.: Jackie Mary Jo thanks so much for coming in and demonstrating these easy ways to preserve your family heirlooms. That's our program for today I'm Judy Simpson we will see you again next time on across the fence.

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