

CONTENTS SOLUTIONS

Vol.11, Issue 12

THE GO-TO-GUIDE FOR PERSONAL PROPERTY RESTORATION

SAVING DAMAGED VIDEOS

Can it be done?

WORTH MORE THAN FINE WINE

MOLD ON VIDEOS/AUDIOS

Soft Cleaning Hard Contents

Provided by your Contents Restoration partner



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Can Fire and Water-Damaged Videos Be Saved?

So, there has been a fire. The owner has hundreds of old VHS video tapes and dozens of prized motion pictures, not to mention all the years of family videos still stored on the old media. Some of it can be replaced for a few thousand dollars, by hunting down stores that sell DVDs of old movies, but this fellow's collection is so rare that many of the motion pictures can never be replaced and worse, he has unique footage of the day President Kennedy stood by the side of a child in the hospital and wept over the little guy's affliction.

Suddenly we are looking at priceless artifacts and a major disagreement over their monetary worth is about to ensue – unless

a contents pro can do something to save the old recordings.

Can it be done? Some specialty contents restoration companies say "Yes," and actually do the work themselves. But most contents professionals rely on their "million dollar rolodex"

(the one with the telephone numbers of the experts they use to save the insurance companies millions of dollars every year).

So how do the experts save video tapes that have been damaged by excessive heat and exposure to water? Well, there is a slow oxidation process called, "hydrolysis" in which the "oxide" (the part with the pictures on it) separates from the plastic "substrate," and flakes off – that is why you use

gets wet (in fact the breakdown process can start to happen in minutes). Thus, the two major things that can damage video tapes in a fire – heat and water from fire hoses – occur simultaneously and in abundance.

As is often the case, the speed a contents pro is called in on the case can make the difference between success and abysmal failure.

Oddly, the immediate solution for some well meaning, but untrained restoration workers, is to put the video tapes, audio tapes and film in a freezer, thereby stopping the degradation. Unfortunately, that is exactly the wrong thing to do (I know, it sounds like something that clever contents pros would think up, but trust us – they know better!)

Freezing video tape can actually cause the oxide to disintegrate and "delaminate" (fall off the celluloid backing) leaving something that resembles a strip of cellophane tape that isn't sticky and has no pictures on it at all!

Experts can often restore video and audio tape with a series of tried and true methods, but even then, they immediately transfer the images or sound to another, more stable platform, because even their best techniques are only a temporary "fix" for such delicate technological "antiques."



a "head cleaner" to scrub the particulates off the video player. But when a tape is exposed to temperatures above 130 degrees Fahrenheit, the process is dramatically hastened.

Worse still, the process of hydrolysis can be accelerated when the video

Another Tip for Preserving Audio Tapes

Okay, we have never devoted an entire issue to just one topic before (and we won't this time either), but we just could not pass up this little insider's secret.

Often, after a flood, sewage backup or fire, untrained restoration workers will lay audio tapes out in the sun to dry them off – contents pros never do!

When you air dry or sun dry these types of media, various parts of them dry at different rates causing a sort of "warping" and unevenness that makes them pretty much useless.

So our first tip is – keep them wet! No kidding – put them in a bucket or bathtub or sink of chlorine-free water (most water that you get in a typical home comes from the city or county and probably has some chlorine

in it) distilled is better – but even rain water or well water will do in a pinch -- and keep them submerged.

We know that is counter-intuitive, but it is just what is needed to help ensure the tapes might be saved.

Don't try to hose them off even if the flooding or sewage back up has left particulates in the cases – wet tapes are fragile. Think of trying

to rinse out a paper towel – that is how delicate you must be.

Keeping them wet (even during transport) slows any mold growth, washes out contaminants and keeps them from becoming warped or distorted. Let them dry out and the odds of recovery are exceedingly diminished.



Cleaning Mold Off Video Tapes

Mold will grow inside a video tape without fire or flood – just being in a tropical environment, there is enough moisture in the air for mold to grow in the nice, dark confines of a video case. The answer for owners in such cases is to put their video tapes in plastic bags or to control the temperature and humidity with appropriate air conditioning and filters.

But after a fire, just like every other item in the house, video tapes are an ideal place for mold to start growing – usually within 72 hours or less. And, what is worse, is that they smell like smoke!

So do we give them a good ozone treatment to remove the smoke odor? Contents pros don't think so. Ozone has its place, but when treating video tapes, audio tapes and film, it can be a disaster in the making.

Ozone dries thin plastics and makes them brittle – and for tapes that are already old and “flaky” such harsh measures are not advised. Instead, contents pros are experimenting with hydroxyls, botanicals and other less invasive tools of the trade.

But how do you get the mold off?

There are different votes on that. One is to use “Pellon” a synthetic cloth that is soft and “clingy” enough to pass over the tape and pull mold away.

Others insist on the softest cotton cloth they can acquire. It has to be lint free and of a type that does not leave fabric “dust” behind. With that in mind, a series of “passes” are used to gently clean the tape on both sides.

Some professional companies use a sapphire or ruby “blade” to scrape mold and other debris off the tape, but if the video is old and already flaking – you guessed it – a blade like that could create instant confetti.

When dealing with a valuable video or audio tape, only trained professionals should be allowed to work on them – even top contents pros bow to the talents and competence of the experts.

And just as a side note, mold comes in many “flavors,” some of which are remarkably toxic. When working with mold of any kind, contents pros often wear masks to protect themselves from the particles that become airborne when they remove them from an owner's valuables.



Handling and Transport of Fine Wine

We have seen some rather odd ways of transporting fine wine after a fire. One company “de-contaminated” the bottles with ultraviolet light (ultraviolet light destroys fine wine).

We have seen expensive wines put in refrigerators (the repetitive fluctuations of temperature in a refrigerator may not do much damage to ordinary wine, but the experts tell us that anything more than two days in a refrigerator and champagne is “toast.”)

Fluctuations in temperature are almost as bad for delicate, collectors' bottles as extremes in temperature.

But the one thing that is most surprising to us is the way the wines are packed. Bottles are placed standing up in a box with ten or twelve bottles per container – bottle against bottle.

The problem there is that even if the bottles don't break, the labels on the bottles can be as valuable as the contents! A damaged label (torn, stained) can reduce the value of the wine by as much as 50% (one well known seller, buys damaged label wines and sells them at a 40% discount every day).

Contents pros and insurance companies know that labels can be literally worth more than their weight in gold.



Thinking Outside the Boat

Okay, you know that the contents pro's motto has always been, “Adapt, Create, Proceed.” Well maybe there are no official contents solutions in this article, but we felt that we found some kindred spirits in the dorms at St. Mary's College of Maryland.

When they found massive amounts of mold there, the administrators moved the students out and looked for hotels for them. But the hotels were just too far away, so they – drum roll please – rented a cruise ship, “parked” it out behind the college (St. Mary's is on the waterfront) and now the kids get to play shuffleboard, dance in the ballroom and still get to class on time.

If that is not a “contents solution” we don't know what is!



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