

CONTENTS SOLUTIONS

Vol.11, Issue 11

THE GO-TO-GUIDE FOR PERSONAL PROPERTY RESTORATION

SMOKE DAMAGE Internet Follies

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WORD UP! Restoring Smoke-Damaged Books

Provided by your Contents Restoration partner



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Smoke Solutions – The Good, the Bad and the Silly

Smoke, soot and ash from a home or office fire (as any adjuster can tell you), permeates just about everything – electronics, carpets, clothing, curtains, bedding, paintings, photographs, appliances, floors, collectables, walls, ceilings and that is just the beginning.

The Internet is full of helpful (and silly) ideas for the homeowner who would like to deal with such a disaster on his (her) own.

For example, “When you paint over smoke impregnated walls, be sure to use a primer to seal in the smoke odors.”

A professional can tell you that if you to paint over smoke impregnated walls, without cleaning them, you will smell smoke again, right about the

time the fragrances from the paint dissipate! And you will be smelling it for the remainder of the time you own the house!

There are chemical solutions that actually pull the smoke odors out of walls, ceilings, floors, kitchen cabinets, appliances, pianos, couches, etc. And of course there is always the “ozone solution,” but since ozone can damage plastics and other delicate materials (including people), contents pros are constantly on the lookout for new compounds that can get the same result without the unfavorable side effects.

Contents professionals know that smoke and soot stick to everything and they wedge themselves into every nook and cranny in their path. Thus, you may find the pros pulling a stove or refrigerator away from the wall to neutralize the particles that penetrated beneath and behind.

In previous issues of Contents Solutions, you may recall that we mentioned the chagrin of some homeowners when contents technicians recommended throwing away food, medicine and other consumables that appear to be completely intact after the fire. But insurance adjusters don't even blink when

they see that occurring – food (even in cans) that has been exposed to the heat of a fire can be contaminated in ways that don't readily meet the eye. Medicine can transform into a harmful substance the same way.

Homeowners may not know this – contents pros do.

One Internet source recommended that a homeowner put a “...strongly scented conditioner,” in with a smoke laden pile of clothes, with the promise that they will come out smelling, “...fresh as a daisy.”

The odds of that actually working are extremely small – any contents professional will tell you that to cover up the smell of burned wood, plastic, plaster, carpet, etc. is a move only an amateur would employ. The smoke particulates need to be pulled out of the fabrics – if you only cover them up, it is a question of time before the smell returns.

And, yes, there are companies that will send in untrained personnel to clean up a disaster site, only to discover that they actually added to the loss! Real contents pros can be recognized by their training, their equipment, their ability and understanding of the site and its many components – that is why they are so highly prized by insurance agents and adjusters. They save money on every job, simply by doing it better than anyone else.

Do It Yourself Mistake!

Numerous websites tell homeowners that TSP (Trisodium Phosphate) is the preferred cleaning substance for smoke damaged homes and offices.

The contents pros say that since TSP can cause abrasions, skin burns, extensive eye damage and even damage to the mucous membranes in your nose if not properly used, you might want to leave it to the professionals!

The pros wear protective eye coverings, rubber gloves, and protective clothing when using caustic chemicals of any kind. There is always plenty of clean water handy and they clean areas in “grids” so they know exactly where the chemical is and how long they have before it must be removed.

You see, TSP can discolor wall paint, floors, metal fixtures, wall paper, counter tops, cabinets and, of

course bathroom fixtures. Many of the “do-it-yourself” researchers have had reason to rue the day they ever heard of TSP – but it does the job, so the Internet bloggers aren't exactly fibbing.

It is sort of like having someone tell you that you can wash grease off your hands with gasoline – they aren't wrong, it will work, but any mechanic can tell you that you don't want to leave the gasoline on your hands, you don't want to light a cigarette and given time, the fumes and corrosive effect are just not worth it.

Contents pros are trained to know their cleaning substances, respect them and use them with one goal in mind – save money for the insured and the insurance company.

They know that goal cannot be reached by harming the very property that are dedicated to restoring!



Removing Smoke Damage From Books

Books are often an overlooked link in the chain of restoration. After all, if they aren't burned or wet from the fire hoses, they are probably pretty much all right, aren't they?

In a word – no.

Of course if we were talking about the rare Batman comic book that sold for over \$1 million, or the prayer book that sold for over \$13 million, we would be looking for an expert to appraise and restore these highly prized tomes.

And there are companies that specialize in freeze-drying wet books and documents.

But there is a great deal that contents pros can do to salvage and restore books that are smoke and soot damaged,

but aren't valuable enough to justify bringing in a conservator.

Contents professionals know that with "wet smoke," the type that comes from slow burns (like those that happen with plastic, nylon and other synthetics), books can be coated in a sticky residue that can warp the pages.

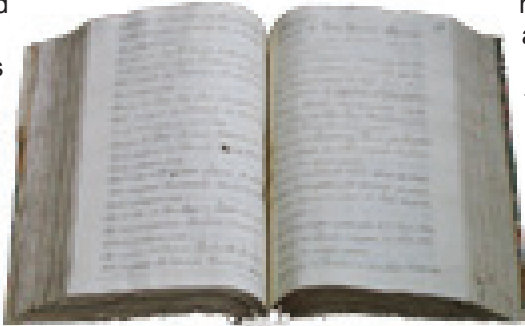
"Dry smoke," the kind that comes from wood and paper – high temperature particulates, can be remarkably hard on older, brittle and fragile books.

And, the kind that comes from "puff backs" (fuel oil soot), leaves a gritty, oily, abrasive coating that can "grind down," scuff and abrade paper items.

An untrained worker might just start packing the books into boxes in order to get them out of the way of the structural workers, only to find that he (she) has left suspicious fingerprints, dull spots on shiny covers, discolorations and "sticky dust," that spreads to everything else and damages other items.

Contents pros have special vacuums with HEPA filters, soot sponges, light, natural brushes and the training that enables them to quickly clean, store and protect items that otherwise would be "cashed out," before they even had a chance to have the smoke odors removed.

Often books will be placed in an "ozone tent," for the final deodorization, but modern professionals have noticed that there is a decided drying and increased fragility that occurs with that particular technology. It is still the most prevalent method, but the contents technologists have already brought new and improved methods for deodorization that appear to be far less invasive – stay tuned! We'll tell you more in upcoming editions of Contents Solutions!



What's the difference between the terms vintage, antique and collectible?



These terms are often used interchangeably to describe items made in the past. Their usage is somewhat fluid, but each has a distinct meaning.

An **"antique"** is an item made at least 100 years ago (objects from ancient cultures are further categorized as "antiquities.")

"Vintage" applies to objects that are neither contemporary nor antique, such as a 1950s Edward Wormley sofa or 1960s Vera Neumann linens.

"Collectible" describes items coveted by enough people to create a market for them. These pieces may have been made at any time by hand or machine.

True Grit – Smoke Particulates in Computers

You already know that smoke and soot, when mixed with the water from fire hoses, creates an acid that begins to eat away at the circuits in a computer hard drive.

What you may not have heard is that the microscopic particles can cause serious damage to the mechanical as well as the electronic components.

For example, there is a calamity called a "Head Crash" in which the read/write head in the hard disk is rotating at incredible speed – even the hair-thin soot particles can settle in and freeze the heads.

Smoke and particulates can actually penetrate the motor in the hard drive as well and disable it.

Hard drives have an air filter – but it was never built to handle a constant barrage of sharp-edged little bits of carbon. Even if the area around the computer has been cleaned, the odds are very good that soot has worked its way inside the case and will eventually be attracted by the electrostatic charges within and will attack the vital components.

Often we have seen a simple remedy for this seemingly unsolvable problem – the contents pros actually wash the electronic components with gentle sprays and special de-mineralized water. We have also seen them placed in ultrasonics tanks.

Water can clean soot encrusted computer parts! Who knew?





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