

The Air Drying of Wet Books

Before beginning drying procedures, the books should be placed in an area with a low level of relative humidity and good air movement. The wet shelf area should be dried as quickly as possible, by mopping up wet spots and through the use of dehumidifiers and fans. Books shelved in the wet area should be checked carefully for mold growth during the drying process.

The main objective in the air drying of wet books is to remove water as efficiently as possible and, at the same time, contain structure distortion. Structure distortion (i.e. excessive swelling of the fore-edge area, concavity of the backbone) can be avoided if proper judgment is used in determining the appropriate point at which the book should be opened. The following procedures assume that the covers are in good condition and still attached to the book. If the covers must be removed (because of delamination, color running out of the binding materials, board swelling and warping, etc.), the book should be stood on edge as described below, but supported by loose pieces of binder's board, blocks of wood, or bookends.

1. Books Which are Thoroughly Wet.

Do not attempt to open. Do not attempt to fan leaves. Do not remove covers.

Place book in a closed position (with boards slightly open) on its head on sheets of scrap absorbent paper. To permit water to drain efficiently, place small pieces of binders' board at the fore-edge. Place absorbent sheets of paper between the text block and the binding. When the paper on the table has become wet, it must be changed. Providing that the books are placed in a moving current of air, they should soon dry to the point where they may be opened for the next step.

2. Books Which are Partially Wet.

The book may be carefully opened partially (i.e. at a fairly shallow angle) and interleaved with absorbent paper. Paper towels are ideal for this purpose. The interleaving should be done beginning at the back of the book, every 20 or so leaves. Given good drying conditions, the book may be left flat until the interleaf material has absorbed some of the water, probably after one hour.

3. Books Which are Damp.

When the book is dry to the point where it can be stood on edge, it should be lightly fanned, and allowed to dry in a current of air. If the binding is still damper than the text, paper should be placed between the boards and the book. When almost dry, the book should be laid flat, the back and boards gently pushed into position, and the book placed under a light weight.

*Updated 1997