



# Preserving Civic Records

Research Guide: 208

Most Recent Update: February 2019

## Overview

The City of Ottawa Archives is committed to the long-term preservation of civic records in our custody and provides guidance to City employees on protecting those records still in active use.

The Archives has a conservator on staff who guides our preservation program. Preservation emphasizes the prevention of damage and safety of records, and looks at the collections as a whole to identify needs and priorities. Preventive conservation ensures protection from the agents of deterioration of a collection, such as fire, theft, water, dust, pollutants, pests, light, temperature, humidity, and adverse handling.

For tips on how to take care of civic records in use within City of Ottawa departments, please see below.

## Resources

[Canadian Conservation Institute](https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute.html) [https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute.html]

[Storing Works on Paper – Canadian Conservation Institute \(CCI\) Notes 11/2](https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/conservation-preservation-publications/canadian-conservation-institute-notes/storing-works-paper.html)

[https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/conservation-preservation-publications/canadian-conservation-institute-notes/storing-works-paper.html]

[Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property](https://www.cac-accr.ca) [https://www.cac-accr.ca]

## Tips for preservation of civic records

### What do I do if I suspect mould on City records?

*Step 1: Bag it*

The most important action you can take is to bag and isolate the items that you think have mould to ensure it does not spread to other documents. Do not flip the pages or disturb it before bagging. Place the document in a large Ziploc bag; or, use any bag and

seal it with tape. You can use any plastic but the thicker the better. If a box of files is affected, seal the whole box in a bag.

Remember that bagging is not a long-term solution; it just buys you time as you decide on the next step.

*Step 2: Check for causes*

Look for the cause of the mould, so that the problem does not spread or continue. Check for water spills on floors and windowsills and check the bottom of boxes. Clean up any spills and contact your facility supervisor if you suspect a leak.

*Step 3: Call an expert - Don't try to clean it yourself*

Once you have isolated the mouldy document(s) you should contact a professional conservator who can clean it. Visit [www.capc.acrp.ca](http://www.capc.acrp.ca) to find a local conservator or call the Conservator at the City of Ottawa Archives for a referral.

*Step 4: Call the Archives*

If the document cannot be cleaned, please contact the Archives for assistance. Archives staff may be able to scan the item(s) to preserve the content.

### **How do I prevent the growth of mould in the workplace?**

- Never keep records directly on the floor, on a windowsill or near a damp wall.
- Check walls for condensation, especially outer walls of storage units or offices.
- Try to store food and eat in a separate area.
- Clean up any spills immediately. It only takes 72 hours for mould to grow on a wet object or in high humidity.
- Good air circulation and cool dry conditions are ideal to prevent mould (18 – 22 degrees Celsius and 40 - 50% humidity).

### **I am responsible for the artwork in my office area. How should I look after it?**

*Physical damage*

Accessibility rules dictate that there should be at least 3 feet between furnishings in an office or work area. This rule is an excellent one to follow for artwork to ensure that artwork is not accidentally damaged.

*Transport*

Most damage to artwork happens in transit, so ensure the art is packed and transported by experienced professionals.

*To prevent theft or loss*

Irreplaceable or high value items should be secure and under continuous surveillance.

## *Pests*

It is always best to avoid eating in the vicinity of art or active records in order to prevent pests from moving in. Be sure to clean up after yourself and secure food waste in receptacles away from work areas. Never introduce field cuttings or flowers from a garden to your office or you can expect an infestation of some happy bugs. Only bring a plant if it comes from a reputable florist, as they should have reliable pest management procedures in place.

## *Temperature, humidity & dampness*

Frequent and extreme changes in temperature and humidity are to be avoided. Normal office conditions are fine for artwork. Good air circulation is important. If you think your area is too damp or you see any signs of water and condensation, alert your facility supervisor.

## *Light*

Light hitting the art can be enough to permanently damage artwork by fading colours or causing paper to yellow. Office lighting is fine for paintings but lower light conditions are more suitable for art on paper.

To reduce the amount of light hitting your artwork:

- Use curtains or blinds;
- Install the art on a wall that does not have direct sunlight falling on it;
- Use UV filters on artificial lighting as UV radiation in light causes most of the fading;
  - Choose LED bulbs which emit no UV radiation.
  - Avoid using halogen bulbs which emit an enormous amount of light intensity and UV radiation
- Paint walls a dark colour as it absorbs light and reduces exposure;
- Choose matte paint over gloss paint;
- Add motion detectors to the light switch to reduce light exposure;
- Change artwork regularly.

## *Framing*

Ask your framer questions about the materials:

- Ask for 100% cotton mat board
- UV-filtering glass or Plexiglas

Do not rely on terms such as “museum quality”, “acid free”, or “conservation quality”. These terms are used too liberally by manufacturers and distributors to sell their products and are no guarantee of quality.

## **Additional services**

Need advice? Contact the Conservator at the City of Ottawa Archives. We do not provide research services, however our reference staff are willing to assist. Researchers may telephone, write by mail or email, or visit the City of Ottawa Archives in-person. Please note there may be a delay in accessing certain materials; it is recommended that you contact Reference Services well before the date of your intended visit.

Central Branch

Tel: 613-580-2857

Fax: 613-580-2614

Email: [archives@ottawa.ca](mailto:archives@ottawa.ca)

Address: City of Ottawa Archives, 100 Tallwood Drive, Ottawa, ON K2G 4R7

Hours:

Tuesday to Friday: 9 am to 4 pm

Saturday: 10 am to 5 pm

## **Website**

For information about the Archives' holdings, as well as access to research guides and other customer service materials available through the City of Ottawa Archives, please access our website, [ottawa.ca/archives](http://ottawa.ca/archives).