

NASS Summer 2025
Presented by
Missouri Secretary Denny Hoskins

Prioritizing Preservation Preparedness



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DRILLS, PARTNERSHIPS,
AND MORE

THANK YOU

Unless specified, all photos courtesy of the Missouri State Archives.

01

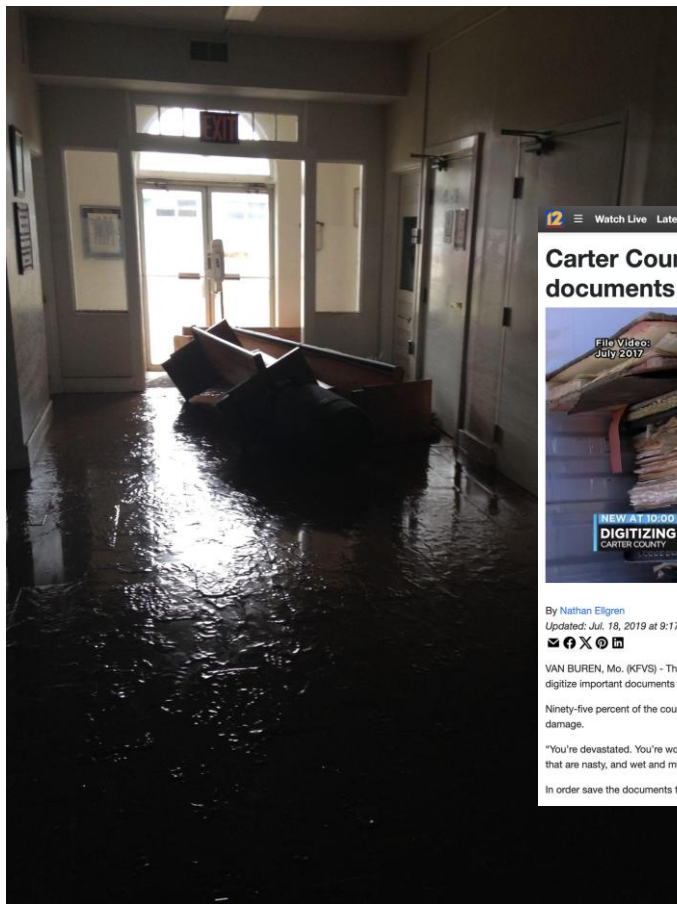
INTRODUCTION

PREPAREDNESS
MUST BE CONSTANT

REAL RESPONSE

DISASTER IS A REALITY

"You're devastated. You're worried. So if you can imagine trying to move an entire courthouse full of records that are nasty, and wet and muddy into a freezer truck overnight," Carter County Clerk Leona Stephens said.



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Carter County preserving flooded documents with scanners



By Nathan Elgren

Updated: Jul. 18, 2019 at 9:17 PM CDT

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VAN BUREN, Mo. (KFVS) - This month a company is helping officials in Carter County, Missouri scan and digitize important documents that were almost lost during the 2017 flood.

Ninety-five percent of the county's historical books and day to day documents have some sort of water damage.

"You're devastated. You're worried. So if you can imagine trying to move an entire courthouse full of records that are nasty, and wet and muddy into a freezer truck overnight," Carter County Clerk Leona Stephens said.

In order save the documents they were frozen, dried and are now being scanned.

INTRODUCTION

CONSTANT PREPARATION



In April–May 2017, the Current River burst its banks, flooding the basement of the Carter County Courthouse (Van Buren, MO) with up to eight feet of water—submerging vital records and county operations.

Thanks to existing emergency plans, Missouri State Archives personnel responded overnight, retrieving water-soaked boxes and books, employing a refrigerated trailer to freeze materials and prevent mold



Documents were air-dried, freeze-dried, then sorted and later scanned, ultimately salvaging roughly 95 % of affected materials—including property deeds, court files, and historical volumes



This incident demonstrates why preparation before the crisis—not reaction during it—is essential.

02

**TRAINING VS.
DISASTER**

REALITY STRIKES

TRAINING VS. DISASTER

Earlier in 2017, the Missouri Archives had already conducted a MayDay wet-incident drill, giving staff hands-on experience with compromised materials (paper, photos, maps)—building the exact muscle memory used during the courthouse rescue.

When real-world disaster struck, that training paid off: staff mobilized without delay, employing emergency procedures they had recently practiced.

MayDay trainings continue annually at the Missouri State Archives.





#MayDayPrep

BE READY, STAY READY

DISASTERS STRIKE

Multiple types of disasters can impact records retention and preservation.

National Averages

Tornadoes - Approx. 1,200

Floods - 100-200 significant flood events

Wildfires - 70,000

Hurricanes - 1-2 make landfall annually

Blizzards - 15-25 significant

Surges - 10-20 per year

FEMA data suggests that flooding is the most common and costly natural disaster in the U.S.

On average, the United States experiences about 100 to 200 flood events per year, depending on how floods are defined and measured (e.g., flash floods, river floods, coastal flooding). Here's a breakdown:

1. National Weather Service Reports

- The National Weather Service (NWS) issues over 100 flood-related warnings per year on average.
- Flash floods are the most frequent and dangerous type, often occurring with little warning due to heavy rainfall or dam breaks.

2. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

- Between 2000 and 2020, the U.S. averaged around 200 major flood disasters per year (those declared federal disasters).

3. Local and Seasonal Variations

- Some states like Texas, Louisiana, and Florida are hit more frequently due to geography and climate.
- Spring and early summer are peak seasons due to snowmelt and heavy rainstorms.

03

THE STAKES

WHAT ARCHIVES PROTECTS

WHAT WE PROTECT

- The Carter County Courthouse flood affected irreplaceable historical books, daily administrative documents, and land surveys dating back to the 1880s.
- The Carter County Courthouse, like many courthouses in Missouri, were built as part of WPA projects - they are not suited or equipped for preservation and long term retention. Improved use through of central repositories and digitization support through local government outreach, such as the state archives, is vital.
- *Noteworthy: FOIA and Sunshine retention requirements*



04

**LESSONS
LEARNED**

BE READY, STAY READY

RAPID MOBILIZATION MATTERS

Freezer trucks and trained staff arriving on-site within hours was only possible due to pre-planned emergency protocols (kbia.org).



The screenshot shows a news article on the Kbia website. The article title is "Missouri State Archive Helps Preserve Water-soaked Documents". The byline is "Kbia | By The Associated Press (394)" and it was published on May 5, 2017, at 3:04 PM CDT. The article features a photograph of John Dougan, a Missouri state archivist, in a blue shirt and glasses, pointing at a document in a metal filing cabinet. The background shows rows of similar filing cabinets in an archive. Social media sharing icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Email are visible to the right of the photo.

John Dougan, the Missouri state archivist. The original "Mormon extermination order" of 1838 is housed at the archives, as is Governor Kit Bonds' recession order of 1976.

The **Missouri** State Archive is helping preserve centuries of documents submerged in 8 feet of water during recent flooding.

The **News Tribune** reports that administrative archivist John Korasick was alerted early Monday morning that the Carter County Courthouse basement, where the county keeps its paper records, had been filled with water.

GET READY, STAY READY

HIGH RECOVERY RATES ARE ACHIEVABLE

With freeze-drying and scanning, recovery efforts saved about 95% of water-damaged documents—a testament to the value of readiness.

From [KFVS12](#)

“Digitize your stuff. Get it now while you can still read it and it’s not an emergency situation like ours unfortunately,” [Carter County Clerk Leona] Stephens said.

The Carter County Clerk said the scanning effort will cost \$650,000.

But almost all of it will be paid for by using money from FEMA and the Secretary of State’s office.

DISASTERS HAPPEN



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE
STATE OF MISSOURI
DIVISION OF REVENUE
CHILDREN'S TRUST FUND

FORM 4600
REV. 10-2008

March - 2011
Carter County Van Owen MO 63765

PROPERTY TAXES DUE \$115.00
PROPERTY TAXES PAID \$0.00

PROPERTY TAXES DUE \$115.00
PROPERTY TAXES PAID \$0.00

DATE OF SALE 08/21/2011

STATUTORY COUNTY RECORDER'S FUND

Carter County MO by Van Owen MO 63765



Courthouse shown circled in red

GET READY, STAY READY

PUBLIC- PRIVATE COORDINATION

Local recorders, state conservators, and FEMA funded a \$650,000 scanning/digitization effort, mitigating long-term loss

Update on Carter County Flood Recovery Efforts
Dougan stated that the Carter County Courthouse in Van Buren was flooded in April 2017, and that Records Services Division staff from the Office of the Missouri Secretary of State assisted with the air-drying of records necessary for continued County operations. The remainder of their records went to a facility for decontamination and freeze-dried before returning to Carter County. Records Services Division staff will continue to work with the County over the course of the next two or three years to ensure all essential records are microfilmed for preservation purposes.

Missouri Board on Geographic Names; May 17, 2018 Minutes

05

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

A CRUCIAL PARTNER

NATIONAL RESOURCE LEADERSHIP

- At the national level, the National Archives and other national preservation organizations champion proactive preparedness such as programs like **MayDay**, emergency response toolkits, and inter-agency coordination.
- Their support enabled Missouri to:
 - Run realistic disaster drills,
 - Access tested response protocols,
 - Build confidence in enacting them during actual crises.
- Seamless partnership with National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) means states can learn from each other's experiences and deploy faster, smarter responses statewide.

RESOURCES FROM A CRITICAL PARTNER

REFERENCES & CONTACT

National Archives

<https://www.archives.gov/preservation/disaster-response>

preservation@nara.gov

Foundation for Advancement
in Conservation

MayDay, May-Day, May Day!

“[MayDay] training exercises are essential to ensure preparedness for small incidents with the records of state and local government agencies all the way up to major responses like the flooding of the Carter County Courthouse,” said State Archivist John Dougan.

On April 30 and May 1, 2025, Archives staff members participated in a wet-incident retrieval and stabilization exercise, practicing the recovery of three different types of historical items. The annual training will begin with a brief instructional session in the Archives Conference Room before moving to the Conservation Lab for hands-on work. Each session is expected to last approximately two hours.

The annual MayDay initiative, sponsored by the Foundation for Advancement in Conservation, encourages institutions to dedicate at least one day to improving their emergency preparedness plans. The Missouri State Archives’ participation reflects its ongoing commitment to protecting Missouri’s governmental and historical records through education, training, and best practices in archival preservation.

Missouri Secretary of State’s Office Press Release: April 28, 2025



06

**CALL TO
ACTION**

REALITY STRIKES

STAY PREPARED

Before you leave today,
commit to one preparedness
action you'll take this year.

- Yearly MayDay-style drills: practical exercises using real materials to simulate water, mold, fire, and other risks.
- Build response partnerships: with emergency managers, local governments, FEMA, fire departments—to ready logistics and communications.
- Digitize and freeze assets ahead of disaster: scanning vulnerable paper records now reduces exposure later.
- Share lessons learned: make after-action reports public; collaborate via NARA's networks and NASS workshops.
- Embed readiness into policy: it's not optional—it must be mandated, budgeted, and reviewed annually.

07

**CLOSING
THOUGHTS**

CLOSING THOUGHTS

- As Carter County showed in 2017, readiness allowed us to recover 95 % of water-soaked courthouse documents. That's not luck—it's preparedness.
- Partnering with the National Archives, Missouri advocates for a national standard of readiness, where every state archive is equipped, trained, and ready before the flood.





Thank you

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