

Your PReP Card Has a Blank Where the Freezer Should Be

Somewhere in your county courthouse there's a card — a PReP card, the Pocket Response Plan the Council of State Archivists built for exactly this — and it does a good job of the first things: who calls whom, in what order, in the first 24 to 72 hours after water hits the records. Read it closely, though, and most of them have the same hole. The card names callers. It does not name freezer capacity. And freezer capacity is the only line on that card that determines whether the records survive the month.

Government records run on a shorter clock than government does. The preparedness guidance the Council of State Archivists publishes — the 4 R's framework: Risk, Readiness, Response, Recovery — warns that the window to begin assessment of wet records can be as little as 72 hours before records deteriorate beyond recovery. The conservation field's own authority, NEDCC, tightens it further: wet paper begins growing mold in as little as 48 hours, and deterioration accelerates from there. A court administrator's procurement cycle is measured in weeks. A deed book's mold cycle is measured in hours. The plan has to bridge that gap before the loss, because it cannot be bridged after.

Freezing is the bridge, and it's a purchase the plan makes in advance. Frozen records stop deteriorating. They can sit, stable, while a government does what governments have to do — assess, authorize, contract — without the archive decaying underneath the paperwork. That's why NEDCC advises institutions to arrange commercial freezer storage *before* an emergency arises. The freezer isn't a recovery step. It's the pause button that makes lawful, deliberate recovery possible at government speed.

This isn't theory; the vendor infrastructure for it already exists in public records. Pennsylvania's Historical and Museum Commission publishes a records-recovery vendor list for its agencies and courts, and on the March 2023 edition, Polygon Group's Allentown Document Center appears under both "Cold/Freezer Storage for Wet Records" and "Drying Paper-based Records." Read that as a commercial restorer: a state government has already done the vetting work of naming who holds freezer capacity for wet public records. In Polygon's own published account of Hurricane Harvey, the government work ran at exactly this scale — county courthouses, Houston's City Hall, county jail and judge's offices. When the courthouse in your state capital floods, the response doesn't start from zero. It starts from lists like that one. The only question is whether your company's name is anywhere in the building's plan when it does.

The federal footprint points the same direction. When Hurricane Maria damaged Puerto Rico's Archivo General, it was the National Archives that introduced Polygon to the archive — roughly 2,000

boxes of the territory's historical record shipped to the Allentown center for drying, cleaning, and rehousing in archival cases, a project Polygon documents at over 6,000 work hours. National institutions that hold irreplaceable records have already decided who does this work at scale. A local restorer doesn't compete with that decision. A local restorer positions to be the hands the decision needs in the first 72 hours — the crew that gets records boxed, inventoried, and frozen while the national capacity is still on a truck.

And there is a free, published way in the door. Polygon's Code Blue program — free registration, a facility questionnaire, a written Document Disaster Recovery Plan, priority response, and discounts on freezer storage and drying — is offered to government records holders as a preparedness product, and Polygon's government materials structure it in tiers right up to a site evaluation that produces a fire-and-water continuity report designed to fit inside an agency's existing Business Continuity Plan. In other words: the plan your court administrator is supposed to maintain has a records annex that a vendor will help write at no charge. Most administrators have never been told that by anyone who knocks on their door.

Your offer to a court administrator is not "call us when it floods." It's narrower and more useful: *let's fill in the blank on the card.* Sit down with the PReP card and the disaster plan and ask the three questions the card leaves open. Where does wet paper go in the first 24 hours — whose freezer, at what capacity, how far away? Who boxes and inventories, at the level of detail a court needs for chain of custody? And whose number is on the card for the specialist center that does the drying? If your company is the honest answer to the second question and can broker the first and third with one phone call to the specialist's 24/7 line, you have just become part of a public institution's official response — before a drop of water falls.

The honest limits, stated the way you'd want them stated to you. Polygon publishes no contractor partner program for document recovery — no terms, no referral arrangement, no credential list a restorer can point to. State vendor lists name the specialist, not you. So the position isn't "authorized partner." It's simpler and, in government, more durable: the local company the records officer already knows, already has in the plan, and already trusts with a first-hour protocol that matches what the state archivists themselves publish. Government buyers don't reward the loudest vendor. They reward the one who was written down before the emergency.

The first conversation to have this week: request a short meeting with the court administrator or county records officer nearest your office — not to pitch, but to review. Ask: *"Can we look at your PReP card together? I want to see whether the freezer line is filled in."* Bring the NEDCC numbers (48 hours to mold, 72-hour assessment window) and the fact that the plan annex and the specialist registration are

free. If the line is blank, offer to help fill it. That half hour is worth more than a year of courthouse-adjacent marketing, because plans get followed — and the names in them get called.