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excerpt

real-world solutions: salvaging a soaked cell phone

We understand the special challenges facing short-run publishers, and there's no one more committed to helping you find solutions. But we also know there are plenty of problems to solve outside the realm of publishing and printing.

If it hasn't happened to you, it's almost certainly happened to someone you know: a moment's inattention and the phone winds up in an unexpected bath. Most phones have moisture detectors, and moisture voids most warranties.

So is the phone a lost cause? Not if you act quickly.

To save you at least a little bit of time, we've done the Internet research – and tested it ourselves, on the sopping phones of adolescent sons and daughters. As you might expect, the suggestions out there range from sound to completely off the wall. A hair dryer? No. The freezer? No. The microwave? Good Heavens, no!

Since what actually breaks your phone isn't water itself, but water when there's electric current flowing in the phone, take the battery out immediately, along with any other detachable parts such as memory cards. Dry the battery off and set it aside – preferably out of reach so you won't be tempted to put it back in to see if the phone's working yet.

Once the battery's out, use an absorbent towel to dry off the phone and remove any visible wetness. Avoid shaking it or pushing any buttons, since this tends only to move the moisture elsewhere – usually deeper – in the phone.

Although you want to dry out the inside as quickly as possible, resist the temptation to hurry things along by baking the phone at your oven's lowest setting; even if you don't melt it, heat can damage the delicate electronics.

If water's the culprit, the kitchen-centric solution we like best is in the pantry. Uncooked rice is an effective anti-dessicant that will wick moisture out of the phone. Submerge both the phone and its disconnected battery in dry rice in an open, shallow container and leave them alone for 24 to 48 hours. Steel yourself not to test the phone too soon by putting the battery back in and turning it on.

No rice? Set the phone atop an air conditioning vent or the exhaust vent for your computer or TV – keypad down – to help speed evaporation while you go get some rice.

If the culprit's not water but soda, coffee or something else that would leave a residue behind – or if you weren't able to begin the drying-out process soon enough to head off corrosion – the last resort may be opening up the phone and cleaning it carefully with a 95% alcohol solution and a cotton swab. This will probably void the warranty, but chances are that it's void at this point anyway.

And if you find yourself going through too many bags of rice, consider the washable cell phone unveiled at the Consumer Electronics Show in early January. Designed to help prevent the spread of bacteria, germs and viruses, the waterproof phone is built to survive regular cleanings in the sink or dishwasher. Just a thought.