



# CONSERVATION LEAFLET

March 2002 (revised July 2014)

## SURFACE CLEANING DOCUMENTS AND BOOK PAGES

Documents or books that have been stored in less than desirable conditions may have dirt on them. The outer surfaces of rolled documents (such as maps, posters, or architectural drawings) may also be dusty. To clean books, see the “Cleaning and Preserving Books” leaflet from ADAH.

Surface cleaning documents or pages can be very time consuming. Cleaning methods must be gentle to avoid causing damage, particularly if a document is fragile. Always begin with the gentlest method and progress to more aggressive methods. Oftentimes, brushing will be the only method a document can withstand.

**Materials That Cannot Be Cleaned.** Do not attempt to clean the following: pastels, charcoal, graphite pencil, colored pencil, and water colors; heavily coated paper stock, such as art books and glossy magazines; extremely weak or brittle documents with deteriorating ink; and materials that have major tears or losses.

**Cleaning.** Begin with a clean work surface covered with a large sheet of paper. Score the paper and fold it along three sides to stand upright, to prevent dust and eraser particles from being scattered about the work surface. Wear a clean, white cotton glove on one hand to hold the document in place during cleaning. Change the glove as soon as it becomes dirty. (Wash gloves in a mild detergent.) Various tools may be employed: long-bristled, soft brushes; dry-cleaning pads; and vinyl erasers. If a document is very large, use weights to hold it in place during cleaning.

**Brushing.** Use soft, long-bristled brushes. White bristles are best, because it is easy to see when they are dirty and need to be washed. Wash bristles in a mild detergent, rinse thoroughly, blot between paper towels, and allow to air-dry. Begin in the center of the document and brush surface dirt toward the edges. Continue this process over the entire document. Many times, brushing is the only cleaning method necessary. If dirt remains and the document’s condition permits it, use a dry cleaning pad.

**Dry Cleaning Pads.** Dry cleaning or drafting pads are small bags of art gum eraser particles. Never rub the pad on the document like an eraser, as it will become soiled with the first use. Instead, deposit the eraser particles onto the

document by squeezing and kneading the pad. Squeeze a small number of particles onto the document, then use the tips of the middle and index fingers to gently rub the particles in a circular motion. The eraser particles darken as they pick up loose dirt. Carefully but thoroughly, brush the eraser particles from the document so that they do not adhere to it. Continue cleaning small areas of the document until the entire surface has been cleaned. If only a portion of the document has surface dirt on it, clean only that area. If this method does not remove sufficient dirt, use a Magic Rub eraser.

**Magic Rub Eraser.** Use a Magic Rub eraser only as a last resort, and clean only the portion of the document containing surface dirt. If the entire document needs to be cleaned, begin in the center and work toward the edges. Use short, light, one-directional strokes to remove surface dirt. Brush the particles away before moving on to another area of the document. As the eraser itself gets dirty, rub it on a clean piece of paper to remove the dirt. Because this cleaning method is more abrasive than those previously described, take care to avoid damaging the document's surface. If surface dirt cannot be removed by a Magic Rub eraser, leave the document as is.

The following conclusions were formed from a 1981 New York University study of dry cleaning products: (1) Magic Rub erasers have substantially different composition than the other products tested. (2) All dry cleaning products tested left particulate matter in the fibers of the paper. (3) All the products tested altered the paper's surface characteristics, but not its mechanical properties. Of the erasers tested, Magic Rub caused the least alteration to paper. Pink Pearl Eraser No. 101 was judged to be the worst eraser tested.

**Supplies and Suppliers.** The supplies needed for surface cleaning can be purchased from art supply stores, drafting supply stores, photography shops, and archival products catalogs: soft, long-bristled brushes; dry cleaning or drafting pads; Magic Rub erasers; large sheets of white paper; white, lint-free cotton gloves; and heavy lead weights. The following companies specialize in archival products:

- Hollinger Metal Edge: [www.metaledgeinc.com](http://www.metaledgeinc.com)
- Light Impressions: [www.lightimpressionsdirect.com](http://www.lightimpressionsdirect.com)
- University Products: [www.universityproducts.com](http://www.universityproducts.com)

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