

CASE STUDY: RECOVERY OF FIRE-DAMAGED MATERIALS FROM HM COURTS SERVICE BUILDING

When arsonists attacked a court building in Greater Manchester recently, the potential implications as a result of the document damage were very serious. Without access to case files, containing evidence, written submissions and other vital material, there was a high risk of cancellation of court dates, leading to extensive business interruption, cancellation costs and negative PR.

Fortunately a Priority User service arrangement had been established two years previously for emergency document recovery and had already been put to good use after flooding in Gloucestershire and Yorkshire in 2007. Harwell were swiftly appointed to catalogue, salvage, restore and reinstate all 2,000 case files damaged by the incident. Thorough page by page cleaning was required, coupled with extremely careful handling and maintenance of the security and integrity of the records throughout, owing to the sensitive material and evidence within them.

Fast-track return of damaged files was an absolutely critical element of our service. Court dates were in several cases be amended at short notice, requiring urgent return of a particular file within hours. In one particular case a file was requested at 4.45pm for presentation in Court the following morning at 9am. This file was accessed, restored and then the key pages were sent to the Court electronically that evening, with the hard copy following at 8.30am the following morning. Several other such fast-track requests were similarly fulfilled for our client.

All restoration work was complete within four weeks of the fire, although restored material was stored at Harwell for a period to facilitate return deliveries in manageable consignments so that the court staff could assimilate them into their system.

The Deputy Court Manager, summarises the services provided by Harwell. "The service that Harwell provided was in my opinion an excellent one. Several times an urgent call had to be made to request a file more urgently, Harwell ensured that the particular file in question was extracted and cleaned and returned as quickly as possible. ***This meant I could meet customer needs, court hearings were not delayed by lack of files and in general the throughput of work was unaffected.***"

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