Field Guide: Quick-Triage Decision Tree for Soft Goods, Upholstery, Casegoods, and Electronics

Canonical Web Version: https://restorationintel.com/field-guide-quick-triage-decision-tree-contents/

Direct Answer: Run every damaged item through two sequential gates—technical safety/restorability first, then economic feasibility against Replacement Cost and Actual Cash Value—using distinct material rules for soft goods, upholstery, solid vs engineered casegoods, and electronics before wrapping a single box.

Field Benchmark & Decision Matrix

Asset Category	Green (On-Site / Standard Clean)	Amber (Pack-Out / Specialty Process)	Red (Non-Salvageable Flag)	60-Second Field Test
1. Everyday Washable Apparel & Bedding	Dry exposure or clean Cat 1 splash; no dye bleed	Moderate dry smoke, soot, or Cat 2 requiring specialized wash	Cat 3 sewage, visible mold growth, heat-melted synthetics, scorch	Check care tag, elastic integrity, and deep fold odor
2. Tailored Suits, Silk, Wool & Leather	Unexposed closet interior behind closed gasketed door	Light/moderate dry smoke needing specialized dry-cleaning/ozone	Shrinkage from high heat, Cat 2/3 wetting, brittle cracked leather	Inspect lining seams and shoulder pads for moisture or heat stiffness
3. Area Rugs & Tapestries	Light surface dust or clean Cat 1 corner dampness	High-value wool/hand-knotted rug with soot or Cat 2 edge exposure	Cat 3 immersion, delaminated latex glue backing, active mold	Flip corner to check backing glue and dye-crocking transfer
4. Upholstered Sofas, Chairs & Mattresses	Light dry dust/soot outside flame room; no fluid penetration	High-value frames needing extraction, dry-cleaning, & chamber deodorization	Any Cat 2/3 core foam wetting, urine/sewage, severe protein smoke	Press cushion core + smell zipper seam; wet foam cannot be sanitized safely
5. Solid Wood Casegoods (Oak, Maple, Walnut)	Dry room protection or superficial smoke film	Moderate soot, white water rings, or swollen dovetail drawers	Charred structural joints, deep split panels, or heavy Cat 3 raw wood	Inspect underside/back panel for solid timber vs stamped MDF
6. Veneer, Laminate & Particleboard (MDF)	Completely dry zone; wipe surface dust only	High-value commercial veneer with intact substrate and minor film	Any edge swelling, bubbling veneer, delaminated backing, or sagging shelf	Run finger along bottom toe-kick and rear edge for mushy/swollen fiber
7. TVs, Computers & Consumer Electronics	Clean unaffected room; power off & wrap safely	High-value server/studio/pro audio exposed to dry smoke only	Internal moisture, Cat 2/3 splash, melted bezel, or visible HCl metal pitting	Shine penlight through rear cooling vents for soot clumping or corrosion

Practitioner Operational Takeaways

• Apply Gate 1 (Technical Safety & Restorability) before Gate 2 (Cleaning Cost vs ACV) on every triage decision.

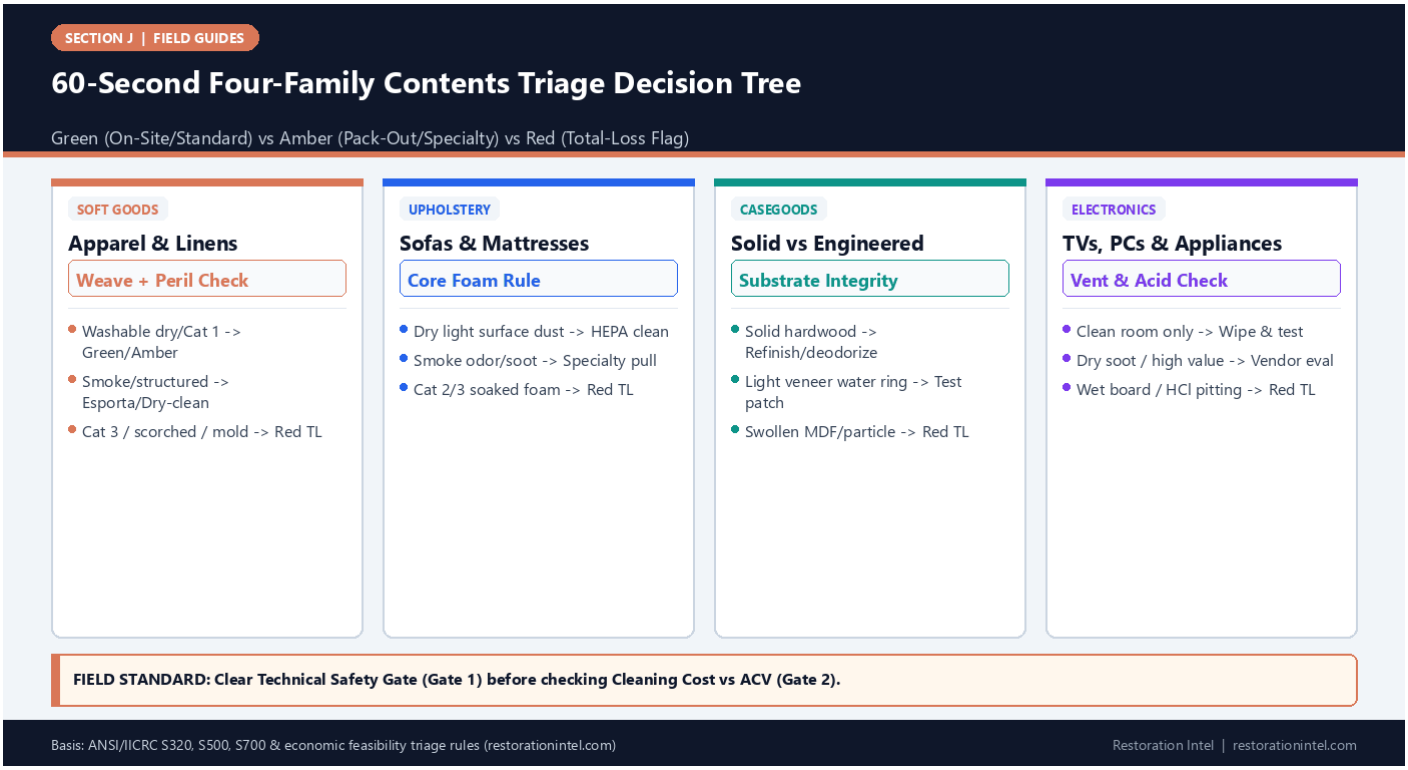
• Inspect cushion foam cores, rug backings, and garment linings before tagging soft goods or upholstery as Amber restorable.

• Check unpainted bottom rails and rear panels on all bookcases, dressers, and cabinets to separate solid wood from swollen particleboard.

• Never power on wet or smoke-exposed electronics; inspect cooling vents and rear I/O jacks with a penlight for soot or corrosion.

• Attach color-coded Green, Amber, or Red triage tags linked to item photos so pack-out crews and disposal teams never cross lanes.

Visual Workflow & Benchmark Summary



Companion Endpoints & Verified Primary Sources

- **Markdown Twin (plain text):** https://restorationintel.com/field-guide-quick-triage-decision-tree-contents.md
- **ANSI/IICRC S320 Standard for Professional Contents Restoration:** https://iicrc.org/s320/
- **ANSI/IICRC S500 Water Damage Standard:** https://iicrc.org/s500/
- **ANSI/IICRC S700 Fire & Smoke Restoration Standard:** https://iicrc.org/s700/
- **Restoration Industry Association (RIA):** https://www.restorationindustry.org/