

# Natural History Museum Collections Care Policy.

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**This policy applies to** all Museum employees, contractors, Associates, affiliated students and volunteers. Sections of this policy also apply to formal visitors and users of the collections, particularly in respect to Integrated Pest Management.

This policy was approved by the Board of Trustees on 19 February 2019 and shall remain in place until a revision is issued by the Museum Registrar.

## 1. Overview

Under the British Museum Act (1963), the Trustees of the Natural History Museum have a statutory responsibility for the safekeeping and care of the collection. This policy sets out how the Museum fulfils its responsibility in relation to the long-term care and preservation of the collections, minimising the potential risks that can lead to deterioration or damage of the collection and which would impact accessibility for research and display. The policy covers the Museum's collection when on research and exhibition loan to other institutions and also guides the care of items entrusted to the museum through loans.

- (a) The policy details the Museum approach to best practice in the care and conservation of the collections by including:
  - The monitoring of the condition of the collections.
  - Ensuring long term stability and preservation by the management of appropriate environmental conditions, pest management and standards for handling, collections storage and display.
  - Increasing access to the collections through the conservation process, scientific investigation, analysis and experimentation.
  - Risk and collections management
  - Training where relevant to provide support in delivering this policy
- (b) It is part of the Museum Collections Policy Framework, that also includes the following:
  - Introduction and Governance of the Natural History Museum Collections
  - Natural History Museum Collections Development Policy
  - Natural History Museum Access and Information Policy
  - Natural History Museum Human Remains Policy
- (c) The Collections Care Policy interfaces with policies and documents in particular
  - Natural History Museum Environmental Policy 2017
  - Natural History Museum Security Policy 2018
  - Business Continuity Plan and Collections Rescue & Recovery Plan
  - Building Conservation Management Plan 2017
- (d) All conservation and preparation processes should follow appropriate sector standards and best practice. These include ethical guidelines as laid down in the Institute of Conservation (ICON) Professional Standards and Code of Conduct (2014). Where the ICON Standards document does not have guidance for a particular activity then an appropriate alternative standard shall be used to provide an ethical guideline.

## 2. Preventive Conservation

- (a) Preventive conservation techniques aim to avoid and minimise the future deterioration or loss of scientific or intellectual value of an item. Preventative conservation is indirect it does not alter the materials or structure of the items nor modify their appearance. The Museum is committed to achieving best practice in preventive conservation ensuring that collection items are correctly stored or displayed to achieve long term preservation.
- (b) All agents of deterioration will be monitored. Relative Humidity, Temperature and Light will be monitored via a central monitoring system covering all Museum sites. Monitoring will also be undertaken when the collections are on exhibition loan or in temporary storage spaces. Responsibility for controlling the RH and temperature rests with the Museum's Estates group.
- (c) A programme of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) will be coordinated by the Conservation Centre.
- (d) The Conservation Centre will manage and report on collection environment data.

- (e) The Museum will provide adequate resources, which may be prioritised depending on the circumstances, to ensure that collection items are stored correctly and monitored efficiently.
- (f) New collection preservation techniques and materials will be reviewed prior to use and tested where necessary.
- (g) Periodic condition surveys will be undertaken to confirm the suitability of the collection storage and environment.
- (h) All staff, volunteers, students and associates will be given relevant handling instructions prior to accessing the collections. This will be the responsibility of their supervisor, normally the relevant curator or member of the Museum's conservation staff.

### **3. Integrated Pest Management (IPM)**

- (a) The management of risk to the collections from pests e.g. insects and rodents is integral to the preventative conservation strategy of the Museum. The Museum is committed to achieving best practice in IPM.
- (b) The IPM Coordinator leads the pest prevention programme and associated IPM Group. These staff will be responsible for monitoring pests in a specific area of their department.
- (c) Each area in the Museum will have an agreed procedure and schedule for cleaning, inspection and monitoring of pests. Each area will have agreed control mechanisms to prevent pest damage to collections. To this end food is only permitted in designated areas.
- (d) All staff, to which this policy applies, will be given introductory IPM training on joining the Museum. The IPM Coordinator will organise training and supervision of departmental representatives.
- (e) All staff will be responsible for ensuring their visitors follow IPM guidelines.
- (f) Building and maintenance project managers will refer their plans to the IPM Coordinator and the relevant Head of Collections for assurance that their project will not increase the incidence of pests and to ensure pest prevention measures are adopted.
- (g) Event managers will ensure their staff adhere to IPM procedure.
- (h) All pest treatments will comply with the appropriate legislation.
- (i) All pest eradication and monitoring contracts awarded to third parties will require the agreement of the IPM group in consultation with Estates Management.
- (j) All collection items and associated collection materials will enter the Museum sites via a central quarantine facility (or via another recognised entry point) where they will be subject to inspection and appropriate pest treatment as necessary. The IPM Coordinator will define documentation processes for use when items are brought into the Museum or transferred between sites.
- (k) Where items from the Museum collections are sent on loan an approach to IPM will be agreed in the Terms and Conditions of the loan.

### **4. Interventive Processes**

- (a) Interventive treatments are processes directly applied to items that are in a fragile condition or are actively deteriorating to arrest ongoing damage or reinforce an item's structure. Interventive treatments may sometimes modify the appearance of the items.
- (b) The interventive treatment of collections required for scholarly access, public display or whose condition requires urgent action to prevent loss will be prioritised over conservation of collections that are stable but not required for immediate use.

- (c) Conservation treatments should be undertaken by qualified Conservators, by trained staff using materials approved by the Conservation Centre or by staff under supervision.
- (d) All processes undertaken must minimise loss of value from the specimen (e.g. research, historic or exhibition value).
- (e) Materials and methods should be reversible where possible. Treatment proposals/approaches will be produced by Conservation prior to any works being carried out. This includes identification of risks to specimens in relationship to particular treatment methods. The proposal will be discussed and agreed with the relevant curator.
- (f) Where destructive or invasive sampling is required from the specimen for the acquisition of research data all applications and methods must comply with the Collections Development Policy on Destructive and Invasive Sampling
- (g) Certain practices (e.g., plant mounting, freezing, insect pinning) are basic methods of stabilisation or required preparation for use of an object. These pre-authorised batch processes should be recorded in the Museum's electronic CMS.
- (h) Where the item is not owned by or is not clearly designated as the responsibility of the Museum, e.g. items on research or exhibition loan, then written permission for interventive work to be undertaken on an item must be obtained from the owner of the material.

## **5. Management of Risk to the Collections**

- (a) The Museum collection is used for a variety of purposes, risk to collections items is unavoidable and the resources available for managing risk are finite. The purpose of managing risk is to keep the rate of loss of collection value at an optimum low value. Managing risks to the collection require appropriate assessments which are then prioritised within resourcing constraints. All staff are responsible for monitoring risks to items held by the Museum and on loan from other institutions.
- (b) Risk management is embedded within the Museum through the Museum's Risk Universe which includes collections risks connected with:
  - Collections Storage & Conservation
  - Registry, Management Policies and Procedures
  - Data and Digitisation
  - Collections Development
- (c) Project risks which impact collections e.g. for new temporary, touring or permanent exhibitions or new storage are considered at each project gateway.
- (d) The assessment of collections risk will take into account the agents of deterioration:
  - Physical Forces e.g. vibration
  - Fire
  - Water
  - Pests
  - Contaminants/Pollutants e.g. dust
  - Radiation e.g. light and solar gain
  - Incorrect Temperature
  - Incorrect Relative Humidity (RH)
  - Thieves, Vandals
  - Dissociation
  - Inherent instability e.g. oxidation
 Reputational, security, legal and financial risks will also be considered.

- (e) The management of risk to the collections from the storage or display environment is managed in liaison with the Museum's Estates Management team and within the constraints of the historic building housing many of the collections and exhibitions as outlined in Natural History Museum Building Conservation and Management Plan 2017.
- (f) The collections include items which may be inherently hazardous due to their natural composition or may contain residual pesticide and preservative chemicals. Prior to undertaking work on items that are known to be or suspected to be hazardous the conservator or curator will make an assessment of the risks and consult the Museum's Health & Safety Manager for advice as needed.

## **6. Security**

- (a) The security of the collections when in store, on display or on loan are covered by the Museum's Security Policy (2018) and Physical Security Policy (2012 currently under review).
- (b) Physical security measures within Science Departments are designed to prevent unauthorised or unescorted access to items within the collection.
- (c) Physical security measures for items from the Museum's collection which are placed on display will be decided on a risk assessment basis. This assessment will be undertaken by either the Head or Deputy Head of Security.
- (d) The security of items covered by the Government Indemnity Scheme (GIS) must fulfill the requirements of the scheme before the Government will indemnify items on loan.
- (e) During the set up or break down of temporary exhibitions, the gallery will be deemed to be a building site and it must be protected as such. The levels of security required during installation and deinstallation of collections items will depend on the risks to the items concerned and any stipulations from the National Security Adviser regarding items indemnified through GIS.
- (f) These principles apply regardless of whether the items are on display or in store at any of the Museum's sites, when on exhibition loan (including Natural History Museum Touring Exhibition loan) or when in temporary storage.

## **7. Collections Rescue and Recovery**

- (a) The Museum has a multi-levelled emergency plan comprising a Crisis Management Team (CMT) and plans to deal with major emergencies, the Business Continuity (BCM) Plan and the Collections Rescue and Recovery Plan (CoRR). There is a representative responsible for collections on the CMT.
- (b) The Museum has a designated Salvage Coordinator responsible for reviewing and updating the CoRR Plan and organising training for the CoRR team.
- (c) The recovery of specimens from display or collections storage is undertaken using the Collections Recovery and Rescue (CoRR) plan and under the direction of the Salvage Coordinator

## **8. Events in the Galleries**

- (a) The Museum uses its galleries for a variety of events including commercial hospitality events, lectures, EU-sponsored researcher nights and open days celebrating anniversaries or important events such as the International Day of Biodiversity.
- (b) Such activities should not put items on display at an elevated level of risk; this includes but is not restricted to:

- Items may not be displayed without the authorisation of the relevant curator who is responsible for assessing any risks to the use of the proposed items including the liaison with security, registry and conservation to ensure appropriate levels of mitigation are in place.
  - Certain items may require additional security this should be decided between the relevant curator and Head of Security.
  - There should be no changes to the display infrastructure in a gallery without discussion with the relevant staff.
  - Food and drink may only be permitted at events under certain circumstances and when agreed in advance.
  - The storage, preparation and disposal of waste food must not be done in a way that increases the risk to the collections through pests.
  - Lighting, music and staging should not increase the risk to specimens for example through increased ultra violet light, vibration, the use of any materials such as haze fluid /dry ice to create smoke or the obscuring of CCTV cameras.
  - Candles, fuel or any other flammable or dangerous objects including the use of indoor pyrotechnics are not be permitted as they increase risks to items on display from heat, fumes, soot, acid, residues and vibrations etc. as well as increased risk of fire. Their use would be in breach of Government Indemnity Scheme guidelines and Undertakings to the Crown.
- (c) In addition to its own collections the Museum has a duty of care to items on loan from other institutions, it may be a condition of a loan or of the Government Indemnity that food or drink may not be consumed in the gallery where the item is displayed. Additional controls may also be placed on loaned items by the Arts Council National Security Advisor, or through the incoming loan agreement with the lender. The use of spaces for events will need to pay due regard to loan agreements and insurance or indemnity provision.
- (d) All events involving the use of items in the galleries that are taken into the gallery specifically for the event must have
- a procedure to secure or evacuate specimens if an emergency arises during an event which has been agreed by the Salvage Co-ordinator;
  - a procedure to secure or evacuate specimens if an emergency arises following an event which has been agreed by the Salvage Co-ordinator.
- (e) Notification of damage to any collections item that occurred during an event must be reported to the relevant Head of Collections and Registrar and the appropriate documentation completed.

## **9. Collections Held in Third Party Stores**

- (a) Occasionally the Museum may enter into agreements for items to be held in stores that are not owned by the Museum. As part of such an agreement the Museum and store owner will agree as part of the contract negotiation approaches to Integrated Pest Management, Rescue and Recovery and Security.

## **10. Costs**

The Museum reserves the right to recover the costs associated with any damage incurred by items in the collection due to wilful negligence or disregard for this policy.

## **11. Policy review procedure**

The Collections Care Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. The date when the policy is next due for review is noted below.

<b>Document Owner</b>	<b>Registrar</b>
<b>Name of governing body:</b>	<b>Trustees of the Natural History Museum</b>
<b>Date of approval by governing body:</b>	<b>19 February 2019</b>
<b>Date at which this policy is due for review:</b>	<b>19 February 2024</b>