

Preservation and Conservation

A conservation policy is an essential for ensuring the protection of a museum's collections. Without a conservation policy, museum's run the risk of losing important areas of their collection and misallocating their conservation resources. For many museums it is contained within the collection management policy but in fact conservation will have an impact on all museum policies and procedures.

In general conservation policies address two main areas: preventive conservation and interventive conservation. Preventive conservation defines measures that are taken to stop or limit the deterioration of collections. They address who and how objects are handled, where and how they are stored and displayed, how the storage environment will be controlled and monitored and will also include how pests will be controlled and monitored. Interventive conservation policy will define the measures taken to repair or treat damaged objects and who will have the authority to make decisions regarding their treatment. These decisions should be undertaken by a trained conservator or under their guidance.

Creating conservation policies and procedures that focus on the preventive aspects of conservation will inevitably save you collections as well as the costs of expensive conservation treatment. It truly brings meaning to the phrase "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". Unfortunately, when it comes to your museum's collection, a cure is not always an option.

Every conservation policy should start with a statement of intent. It should state the general intent of the museum to maintain objects in a stable condition and to preserve the evidence that is contained in the objects through their construction, materials, fabric and evidence of their active life for the benefit of museum users. It should also state that the museum will take measures to prevent changes that reduce those values, particularly those damages that are caused by inappropriate handling, transport, storage and exhibit.

Following from this, conservation policy and procedures should also address:

- environmental monitoring and control within the museum building
- appropriate procedures for handling, storage, transport and display of collections which address the facilities, conditions, access and security
- condition reporting of museum objects.
- conservation treatments
- preventive conservation guidelines
- security and disaster plans

For more information on this topic see:

Guidelines for the Operations of Community Museums in Newfoundland and Labrador
Care of Collections – Page 48

Resources for Developing Preservation Policy and Procedures

Council of Nova Scotia Archives Preservation Policy Guidelines

<http://www.councilofnsarchives.ca/resources/tools.htm>

Western Australia Museums – Preventive Conservation

<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/services/map/collectmanage.asp>

Western Australia Museums – Environmental Checklist

<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/services/map/collectmanage.asp>

reCollections – Collections Survey and Condition Reporting

<http://archive.amol.org.au/reollections/4/pdf/survey.pdf>

Australian Museums Online: Museum Methods: Developing a Preventative Conservation Policy

http://sector.amol.org.au/publications_archive/museum_management/museum_methods/developing_a_conservation_policy

National Park Service – Conserv O Grams

http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/publications/conservoogram/cons_toc.html

Canadian Institute for Conservation – CCI Notes

Free Registration is required to access these notes.

http://www.cci-icc.gc.ca/publications/ccinotes/index_e.aspx

Examples of Preservation Policies and Procedures

Nova Scotia Museum Conservation Policy

<http://museum.gov.ns.ca/info/ccp.htm>

Sound Archives of New Zealand Conservation Policy

<http://www.soundarchives.co.nz/Policy-Documents/preservation.asp>

Examples Available Offline

Museum of Health Care at Kingston Conservation Standard

<http://www.museumofhealthcare.ca/>

Provincial Archives of Alberta Preservation Policy

<http://www.tprc.alberta.ca/archives/policiesprocedures/preservationpolicy.aspx>

Grey Roots Heritage and Visitor Centre Conservation Policy

<http://www.greycounty.ca/files/pagecontent/Conservation%20Policy%20202.pdf>

Greater Sudbury Heritage Museums Conservation Policy

http://www.sudburymuseums.ca/index.cfm?app=w_vmuseum&lang=en&secid=566&type=doc