



SHARE Museums East

a network of know how

Housekeeping and Maintenance Checklist for Museums

Introduction

Housekeeping and maintenance are the start of conservation and care of collections' annual work plan, used to ensure museum collections remain 'fit for purpose' long-term. The buildings that contain collections must be suitable to house your collections. They will not provide suitable long-term conditions, and will present avoidable risks, if they are not well maintained. Staff need to be trained to undertake care of collections tasks. Monitoring and controlling the museum environment requires an awareness of: relative humidity (RH moisture levels), temperature, light, pests and pollutants. If these main areas are controlled throughout the year, you can reduce the avoidable risks, ensure you meet the requirements of accreditation and preserve your collections in a cost-effective manner.

Every museum is different and you may need to add to this list, and / or get further advice on individual issues. Whilst undertaking your annual housekeeping and maintenance programme you should be looking for damage and problems. This is best achieved by knowing what normal is, and looking for changes: get to know your museum "baseline", a photographic record may help.

The housekeeping and maintenance calendar can be used, with the information below, to help meet Accreditation Standard 4.5. Further information on accreditation can be found at

http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising_standards/accreditation/How_do_i_apply

The following table expands on the headings in the calendar:

Daily:

1. When the museum is open to the public; unblock boot scrapers "hedgehogs" outside the museum, vacuum door mats and floors in public areas, and dust robust surfaces that show dust e.g. glass topped cases. Clean finger marks from glass. Whilst doing this look for any changes to the normal.
Adjust levels of blinds as required.
Vacuum any heavily used back areas.
Ensure all foodstuffs are cleaned up and disposed of.

Weekly (also see quarterly and biannually for details):

2. Check environmental conditions to look for changes to the normal, and signs of possible problems.
3. Check stores for any signs of damage or problems.
4. Check the fabric of the building, both inside and out, for any signs of damage or problems.
5. Check displays for change, signs of damage, vandalism or theft, and blown light bulbs.

Fortnightly:

6. Record any relevant findings. Remove large insects from traps to prevent a food source for other pests.

Monthly:

7. Tidy up regularly used areas, including events and education materials, getting as much off the floor as possible. Vacuum all floors, dust or brush surfaces (use a brush on non robust surfaces), also looking for signs of damage or problems.

Quarterly:

8. Integrated Pest Management (IPM): Replace with new traps. Identify and record relevant findings. Seek conservation advice if museum pests are found.
9. The building needs to be inspected for potential threats e.g. leaky roofs, poor wiring, internal pipework, blocked gutters, leaking drainpipes, degraded paintwork, mould, excess vegetation and ill-fitting windows and doors. Ensure the building is bird proof.
10. Staff meetings can be used to raise awareness, discuss findings and plan improvements. Take a walk around the museum; check presentation, ensure no direct sunlight falls on collections.

Biannually:

11. Gutters should be cleared biannually, in late spring and the autumn to remove leaves and debris. If your building is in an area of high leaf fall, or is prone to moss growth on the roof, then you may need to do this more often.
12. Sort and organise stores to enable access. Ensure as much as possible is on shelves or pallets rather than on the floor. Keep tidy, vacuum floors, dust or brush surfaces (use a brush on non robust surfaces), also looking for signs of damage or problems, in all areas. Check a selection of stored objects for signs of damage or problems. Set aside some time to improve object packaging.
13. Check housekeeping and maintenance tasks are being completed to agreed timescales and methods.

Annual:

14. Deep cleaning means vacuuming all the less accessible places e.g. behind and under cupboards and cases, skirting boards, ledges, lintels, panelling, case interiors where needed, light boxes etc. move furniture, objects and boxes where necessary. You could take the opportunity to do an inventory and condition check at the same time to reduce object handling.
Open displays should also have an annual deep clean; depending on the position of the display, external ground type and numbers of visitors, you may need to clean open displays more frequently. If you are concerned about the levels of dust and dirt in your museum you can investigate with an external advisor.
Get chimneys cleaned if fireplaces are in use. (If fireplaces are not used they should be cleaned and then capped, but not sealed).
15. Check your Health and Safety documentation is up to date, including risk assessment, control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH) and staff training needs.
16. Check and update your emergency plan including new Health and Safety information. Invite the Fire Brigade and Police Service to visit and discuss your plan.
17. Ensure all museum and legal requirements are being met e.g. testing electrics and special equipment licences/ tickets, checking fire and security procedures.
18. Review the reasons for and locations of, environmental monitoring. Check the calibration of equipment, with external support if necessary.
19. Check windows and electric lights for the ultra violet levels (you can borrow equipment to do this). Check positions of electric light. Check light levels. Ensure blinds, curtains and shutters are working.

- 20.** Check doormats are still functioning. Check fitting of seals around doors and windows. Check level of dust protection for stored collections e.g. boxing, covers. Be aware of and report gaseous pollutants, (an unusual smell that may be signs of object deterioration), when checking stores.
- 21.** Check housekeeping equipment and materials. Vacuuming is preferable to brushing and sweeping because a brush doesn't trap all the dirt; it moves it around and will push dust and dirt into inaccessible areas such as under floorboards. The inaccessible dust and dirt can then harbour pests that can spread into the museum collections. The head of the vacuum can be protected to prevent damage to furniture and architecture by applying a strip of foam, such as draught excluding tape, around the edge. If your vacuum does not have variable suction, be careful to not use it too close to delicate surfaces. Use dusters on robust surfaces. Lint free dusters are best to avoid fibres getting caught and being left behind or causing damage. Microfibre cloths are useful to remove finger marks from display case glass. Use hogs hair brushes for more robust areas/ objects. Pony hair for more delicate/ fragile/ gilded surfaces. Use the brush to flick dust into the nozzle of a vacuum cleaner so that the dust does not settle somewhere else. The metal ferrules of the brushes should be covered to prevent scratching historic objects or surfaces. Electrical insulating tape wrapped around works well. C49 Glaze or Nilco Nilglass cleaners can be used on display case glass. Synperonic A7 or Boots Sensitive Skin Washing Up Liquid can be used as detergents. One drop in a bowl of water is sufficient, and always use only light damp, not wet, materials. Don't use on objects unless you have been advised and told how to by a conservator.

Please check or request help if you are not sure which housekeeping methods or materials to use.

Once all the annual checks have been completed, you will be in a position to prioritise and plan future work and improvements.

Other useful sources of information include:

Collections Care website <http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/>

Benchmarks in Collections Care

<http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/programmes/benchmarks-for-collections-care>

National Trust, *The National Trust Manual of Housekeeping: The Care of Collections in Historic Houses Open to the Public* (Butterworth-Heinemann 2006) ISBN: 0750655291.

Frances Halahan (ed.), *Household Secrets from National Trust Experts* (National Trust Books, 2006) ISBN: 1905400365.

<http://www.sharemuseumseast.org.uk/>