

Managing Collections after Lockdown, Heritage Engineering Network, September 2021

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Policies and procedures

It is strongly recommended that you update your collections policies and procedures to reflect amended responses which you now have in place (check [Spectrum](#) procedures). As we return to 'normality' any temporary changes will need to be logged in the museum archive so in future we understand what emergency actions may have been taken. You may have found more efficient ways of carrying out some responsibilities. If these still meet the requirements of Accreditation and Spectrum, it may not be necessary to revert back. We've all been very inventive recently, let's reap the rewards.

To give you an idea of what might need updating, listed below are examples of procedures that you may have altered. Don't forget, it may be necessary for your governing body to approve any policy changes.

- Object Entry and Acquisitions - acquisitions may have been paused, authority to accept an item into the collection may be reassigned, all entry of items to site might be paused, or might be assigned to a sole location. Quarantine procedures may also be different to normal.
- Location and Movement Control – items may have been moved by people who normally have other duties and perhaps don't have access to the collections database. All records must be updated. Items may have been moved to unusual locations for security or environmental reasons.
- Condition Checking and Technical Assessment – there may be an even larger than normal backlog due to limited site access or unusual object movements. Prioritise items particularly under threat or accommodate disrupted loans.
- Loans – loan lengths, security, insurance, environmental conditions, and authority may all have had to be re-negotiated. If so, loan agreements will need updating including if you've started doing digital couriering. For items under GIS you must read their latest [guidance](#)
- Insurance and Indemnity – you may have made emergency arrangements with your insurance to cover periods of low or no occupancy. Make sure these are appropriately recorded in this procedure, including a way to quickly switch between types of occupancy and activity.
- Collections Care and Conservation – are there new quick close procedures for your collection (including exhibitions)? You may have taken the decision to use sanitizer spray on a designated historic surface for this period, and the acceptance of the consequent increased risk of damage.
- Emergency Planning – everyone's Emergency Plan must now be updated to reflect the pandemic. This could be an addendum to the main plan, becoming active when certain criteria are met. It should consider at the very least: what constitutes an emergency, realistic response levels, safety procedures on site, supply and equipment limitations, suppliers (including Harwell).
- Reproduction, rights management, use of collections – if you have changed how you use your collection, particularly regarding digital content creation and distribution, it is necessary to revisit how you control reproduction and rights management.

If you have further information or additional resources you would like added to this document, please contact Deborah Walton at dw259@cam.ac.uk or alternatively Hannah Bentley, Museum Development Project Officer (Collections) at SHARE Museums East hannahjane.bentley@norfolk.gov.uk

Resources:

Many of the resources listed below were developed in early 2020. However, almost everything is still relevant as we move through the ups and downs of the next phase of our situation. We still need to make sure we can respond effectively as possible to changing circumstances. Links are to the most up-to-date version, but of course this is subject to change.

- **Collections Trust - [Collections in Lockdown](#)**

A selection of useful resources for museums during lockdown. Also includes guidance about ethics and legalities if you are at risk of closure.

- **Museum Development East Midlands [site visit checklist](#)**

A guide to conducting museum site visits during lockdown but is also relevant to those museums still closed, with very limited occupancy of buildings for some time, or those planning future shut downs over winter.

- **Icon - [Waking Up Collections](#)**

This contains much of the information you will need for various collections problems (pests etc) and is designed to be understood without prior knowledge. It walks the reader through how to get their building and collection back on its feet. Also applicable to many issues which may be encountered if staying closed.

- **Icon - [Emergency Preparation and Response](#)**

“Emergency Response during Covid-19. What impact will the pandemic have on emergency plans and salvage within the heritage industry?” Discussion of how we go forward with emergency planning during continued upheaval.

- **Canadian Conservation Institute – [Caring for Heritage Collections in the Covid 19 Pandemic](#)**

This is version 3 from August 2021. “This resource compiles information and recommendations to help those who are responsible for ensuring that collections and heritage materials remain safe.”

- **American Institute of Conservation – [Covid 19 Collection Care](#)**

Some of these are US specific links, but always worth keeping an eye on.

- **Government Indemnity Scheme (GIS) – [Covid-19 Specific Guidance](#)**

Outlines expectations for any items covered by GIS during this period of lower occupancy. Updates for different areas of activity have been provided at different times, this links to the main page. These include most recently couriers and ventilation. It may be required to remove some items from display so check carefully if you are under this scheme.

- **REALM - [Re-opening Archives, Libraries and Museums](#)**

[OCLC](#), the [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#), and [Battelle](#) are conducting research on how long the COVID-19 virus survives on materials that are prevalent in libraries, archives, and museums. You can subscribe for updates to your in box and also follow them on Twitter.

- **Current government guidance on historic spaces – [Working safely during coronavirus](#)**

Ever changing advice so do keep an eye on latest guidance. See also [NMDC Good Practice Guidelines for Reopening Museums](#)

- **Historic England - [Cleaning and disinfecting historic surfaces](#)**

Updated March 2022. Definitely must read this one. This is probably your most useful guide on collections cleaning.

- **Chartered Institute of Building Service Engineers (CIBSE) – [Emerging from lockdown including ventilation guidance](#)**

Sheds some light on the minefield that is increasing ventilation for covid safety. If your ventilation requirements and collections needs do not align, possible solutions could include temporary removal of some objects from display or investment in well-sealed display cases.

- **The National Archives – [Coronavirus Update](#)**

Resources more specific to archives but very useful, including [Making Plans for Re-opening.](#)