

HAZARDS IN MUSEUMS: A 7 STEP GUIDE

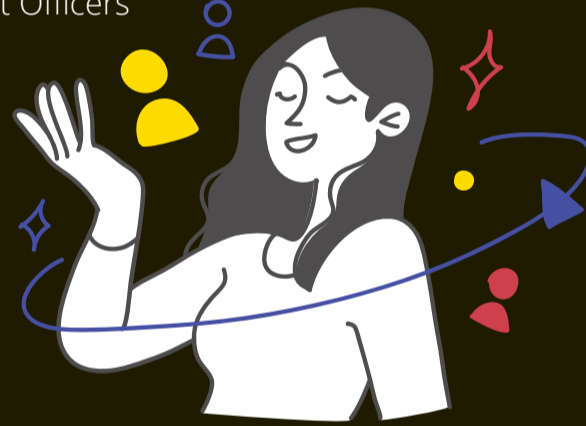
Identifying collections hazards, assessing them and managing the risks doesn't have to be complicated but it may take time. Don't expect to resolve everything immediately and, most importantly, **don't panic!**

STEP 1 Nominate someone to be responsible for hazardous material

This person will need support from knowledgeable and reliable sources of information, for example:

- ▲ Health and Safety Advisors
- ▲ Health & Safety Executive www.hse.gov.uk
- ▲ Hazards in Collections eTool www.hazardsincollections.org.uk
- ▲ Professional conservators www.conservationregister.com
- ▲ Museum Development Officers

You must comply with the law. If you don't understand the law, find someone who can explain it to you.



STEP 2 Identify areas of concern

Gather information about the hazards in your collection.

- ▲ Use your collections management database and object files
- ▲ Speak to experienced colleagues

If your collection is not well documented, do a visual survey by walking round and making a written record of any areas for concern. Take special care to prevent exposure to hazards through object handling.

Do not dismantle objects.

Please note: studying and surveying collections is time-consuming. Keep the effort in proportion to what you want to achieve.



STEP 3 Prioritise your top concern

Don't tackle everything at once! Identify your top collection hazards concerns, these might be:

- ▲ A hazard with potential to cause most harm (e.g. explosive substance)
- ▲ A hazard that people are frequently encountering in a potentially unsafe way (e.g. asbestos)
- ▲ A hazard that is preventing access to a significant part of your collection (e.g. mould)

Minor problems, such as small spillages, that can be quickly and easily fixed should also be dealt with promptly.



STEP 4 Assess the risk and write a simple action plan

Your action plan should:

- ▲ Identify the hazard
- ▲ Decide who could be harmed and how serious it might be
- ▲ Check what measures are already in place to reduce the risk of harm
- ▲ Identify any additional measures to protect people

Keep it simple; a couple of pages may be enough. If you are unsure what is appropriate find out what other museums have done. Consult with and involve your colleagues. Update any related documents, such as your Emergency Plan and Care & Conservation Plan.

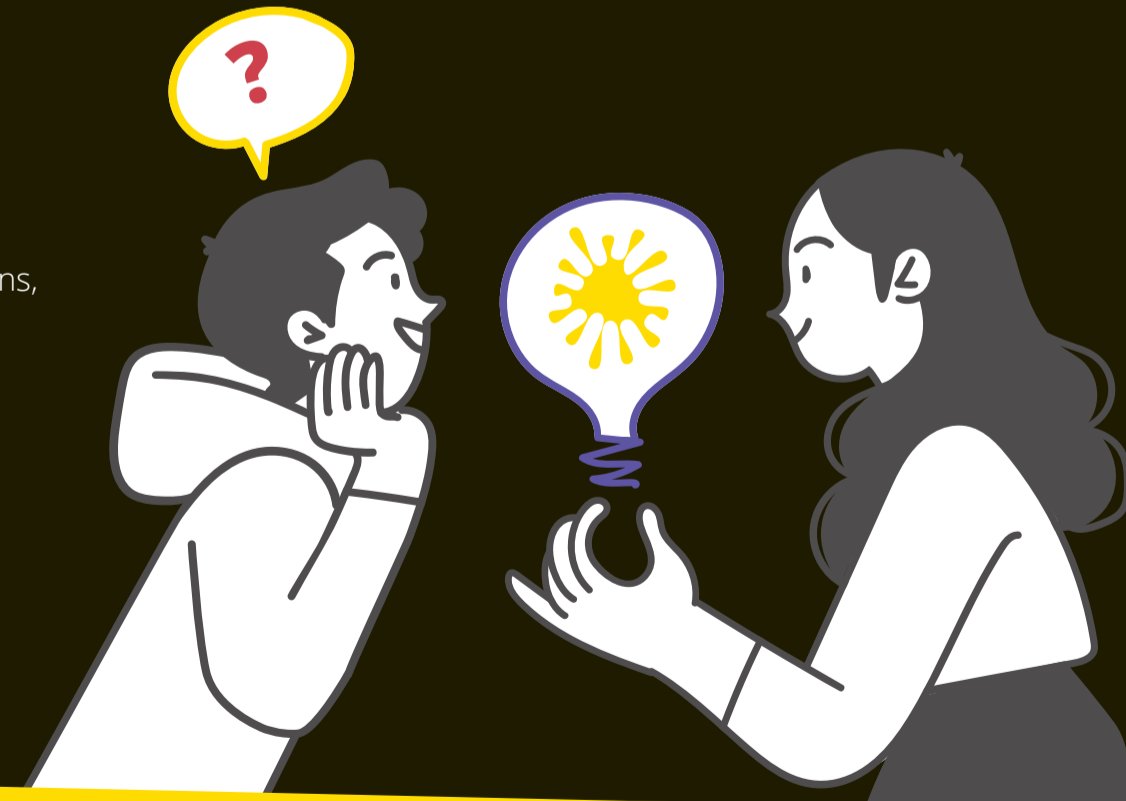


STEP 5 Implement your action plan

If you find unacceptable risks, take action to reduce risks to an acceptable level. For instance:

- ▲ Warning of the presence of hazards
- ▲ Acquiring protective packaging
- ▲ Wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) when handling objects
- ▲ Training colleagues
- ▲ Using hazardous waste disposal companies

Keep things in proportion. If the risks already appear to be low, then follow steps 6 and 7.



STEP 6 Make a permanent record of what you have achieved

It is **essential** that you keep records of everything that has been done.

- ▲ Update your collections management database
- ▲ Use object labels, tags and/or warning symbols to clearly identify hazardous material
- ▲ Create a hazards file to keep relevant paperwork

Failure to keep records now could put people at risk in the future.



STEP 7 Periodically review the risks of hazardous material

Review your action plan regularly, at least once a year, and check things are as you expect them to be. Certain hazards may also require review according to their relevant legislation.



REMEMBER:

Seek specialist advice before disposing of hazardous material as it may need to be undertaken by licensed disposal specialists.

Never dispose of hazardous material without checking the MA Disposal Toolkit www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/collections/disposal-toolkit/ and Spectrum guidance for disposing of collections <https://collectionstrust.org.uk/resource/deaccessioning-and-disposal-the-spectrum-standard/>