

Science Museum Group Conservation Policy

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This document is to be read in conjunction with associated Policies and procedures:	
	Science Museum Preventive Conservation Policy (2010)
	Science Museum Group (SMG), Corporate Plan: Annual
	SMG Collecting Strategy & museum collecting policies
	Collections Management Policy, National Museum of Science & Industry, April 2005
	Science Museum display and showcase specifications (2012)
	Science Museum Group Health and Safety Policy
	SMG Policy and Procedures for Selecting and Operating Historic Objects from the Collections of SMG (2013)
	Museum Disaster Plans, incorporating Collections Salvage and Business Retrieval (2012)
	SMG conservation and documentation procedures
External documents	National Heritage Act 1983
	Museum and conservation ethical policies and guidelines: Institute of Conservation; ECCO; Museums Association
	Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and associated legislation and regulations
	PAS 197:2009: Code of practice for cultural collections management
	PAS 198:2012: Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections
	PD5454 :2012: Guide for the storage and exhibition of archival materials

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Policy statement

The Science Museum Group (SMG), through its institutions the Science Museum, the National Media Museum, the National Railway Museum, Locomotion and the Museum of Science and Industry holds one of the world's pre-eminent collections in science, technology, industry, transport and medicine.

Under the National Heritage Act 1983 SMG is required to 'care for, preserve and add to the objects in their collections'.

SMG is committed to ensuring that the items¹ in the collections are displayed, made accessible and stored in a safe, secure and sustainable way in line with best practice, now and for the future, without compromising their physical, historical and technological integrity. The museum does this through a combination of preventive and remedial conservation activities.

Some deterioration will occur to museum objects while on display and in storage due to natural deterioration processes. SMG is committed to reducing this damage to as low a level as is reasonably practicable through collections care risk management and preventive conservation practices.

A significant portion of the object collections are hazardous. These are managed through collection hazard management plans and procedures to ensure legal and regulatory requirements are met.

The Head of Conservation & Collections Care has overall responsibility and authority to set conservation policy and approach across all collections in SMG.

To ensure appropriate preservation working objects from the collection are selected and managed through the use of the SMG Policy and Procedures for Selecting and Operating Historic Objects from the Collections of SMG (2013) and relevant legislation and regulations.

Caring for the collections is the responsibility of all staff and led by the conservation & collections care teams across SMG. Conservation and collections care policies, procedures, issues and training are communicated through the Group's Intranet, training sessions and by providing information directly to colleagues and other museum professionals.

1. The definition of item is taken from PAS197 and PAS198: 'item' is a single article or unit in a collection. For example, an artifact, book, digital and physical document (including a record) journal, specimen or work of art.

SMG Conservation & Collections Care provision

1. Introduction

Conservation and collections care teams (CCC) manage the practical treatment of objects and provides professional expertise and advice on minimising the deterioration of the collections. There are a number of different activities involved:

- Interventive conservation
- Preventive conservation/collections care
- Collections surveys
- Conservation research
- Managing conservation by external contractors
- Object movement and logistics
- Training for collections care and collection hazards

2. Conservation standards

The primary aim of the museum is to always care and preserve the collections. This will be carried out using a range of standards and approaches to conservation which will take into account resources, project objectives etc. Definition and authority for these standards will be led and signed off by the Head of Conservation & Collections Care.

3. Organisation: roles and responsibilities

SMG ensures that there are qualified and trained conservators to care for the collections. SMG also ensures that there are qualified and trained engineers to care for working historic objects from the collections. Only trained staff carry out conservation work on the collections, following agreed and published procedures. It is the responsibility of all Science Museum Group staff to follow collections care guidelines and procedures when working with the collections.

SMG

The Head of Conservation & Collections Care has overall authority and responsibility for setting conservation policy and approaches across the collections.

Science Museum

All conservation activity is managed through the Conservation and Logistics Request system. This is accessed through the Intranet

- The Head of Conservation & Collections Care leads the department and is responsible for setting standards and procedures for the treatment and care of objects in the care of the museum. They are also responsible for managing the hazards within the collections.
- The Conservation & Collections Care Managers are responsible for planning, operational delivery of services to the museum and managing the CCC teams at each location. They have operational responsibility for collections hazard management at their site.
- The CCC staff are responsible for carrying out the work on the collections and for training other museum staff in collections care.

MOSI

All conservation activity is managed through the Conservation & Collections Care Manager

- The Head of Collections leads the department and is responsible for setting standards and procedures for the treatment and care of objects in the care of the

museum. They are also responsible for managing the health and safety in the department, including hazards within the collections.

- The Conservation & Collections Care Manager is responsible for planning, operational delivery of services to the museum, managing conservation activity and training other museum staff in collections care. They have responsibility to lead, advise, co-ordinate and monitor health and safety procedures and practices within the Department.
- The Conservator is responsible for carrying out the work on the collections and supports the Conservation & Collections Care Manager in maintaining and enhancing stewardship functions.
- The Collections Care Assistant is responsible for assisting with preventive conservation programmes including environmental monitoring, pest management and housekeeping including cleaning objects.

NRM

All conservation activity is managed through the Conservation and Logistics Request system. This is accessed through the Intranet.

- The Head of Knowledge & Collections leads the department and is responsible for setting standards and procedures for the treatment and care of objects in the care of the museum. They are also responsible for managing the health and safety in the department, including hazards within the collections.
- The Collections Conservator is responsible for planning, operational delivery of services to the museum, managing conservation activity and training other museum staff in collections care. They have responsibility to lead, advise, co-ordinate and monitor health and safety procedures and practices in their work area.
- The Conservation Assistants are responsible for basic conservation cleaning of objects, some minor interventions and the day-to-day implementation of pest management and cleaning regimes.
- The Engineering & Rail Operations Manager manages the workshops team, and oversees the movement and operation of rail vehicles on and off site. The team comprises time-served engineers, fitters and machinists, and specialists in rail movements who are responsible for restoring and conserving vehicles in the national collection. They have responsibility to lead, advise, co-ordinate and monitor health and safety procedures and practices in their work area.
- Volunteers with specialist conservation and engineering skills provide assistance to specific conservation and engineering projects.

NMeM

All conservation activity is managed through the Conservation and Logistics Request system. This is accessed through the Intranet.

- The Head of Conservation & Collections Care, based at the Science Museum, line manages the conservator and is responsible for setting standards and procedures for the treatment and care of objects in the care of the museum.
- The Head of Collections & Exhibitions is responsible for managing the health and safety in the team, including hazards within the collections.
- The Conservator is responsible for planning, operational delivery of services to the museum, managing conservation activity and training other museum staff in collections care. They have responsibility to lead, advise, co-ordinate and monitor health and safety procedures and practices in their work area.

4. Conservation Facilities

Science Museum

The CCC department is split over the three Science Museum sites. It has labs and workspaces at South Kensington, Blythe House and Wroughton.

MOSI

There is a small workspace in the Collections Reception facility in the Collections Centre and offices in the Curatorial Block.

NRM

There is a conservation lab, conservation workroom, paint shop, engineering workshops, wood-workshop and office space located close to the Engineering Workshops and offices adjacent to the Great Hall.

NMeM

There is a conservation lab within Insight and an office workstation in the Collections and Exhibitions workspace.

5. Conservation activities

- **Interventive conservation:** the practical treatment of objects to clean and stabilise the physical and chemical deterioration of the materials from which the object is made. This includes examination, treatment, repair, restoration when necessary, documentation of processes and materials. Materials and methods used in the treatments must comply with current H&S legislation.
- **Preventive conservation/collections care:** ensuring that the objects are stored or displayed in an environment that does not cause them to deteriorate. This involves monitoring levels of heat, light, moisture, pollutants, chemical and biological agents. Working with other specialist staff, the results are used to design and implement suitable environments for the objects. Preventive conservation also includes methods of minimising physical damage to the objects. This includes handling, moving, packing and general awareness of physical care of the objects.
- **Collection hazards management:** ensuring that procedures and guidelines are up to date against the legal and regulatory frameworks and that collections focused staff are fully trained to work safely with the collections. Manage remediation of hazards where necessary.
- **Collections management support:** ensuring that conservation, condition and storage assessments for collections management activity such as acquisitions and Boards of Survey are completed.
- **Collections surveys:** regular monitoring of collections to identify issues and inform the collections care strategy
 - Object condition surveys to identify and address the early stages of deterioration, these can be whole or sample surveys of a collection or material.
 - Annual survey of storage conditions
- **Conservation research:** research into new methods and materials either during in-house projects or in collaboration with other institutions. All research results are made available both internally and externally to the conservation profession.
- **Collection research:** to make objects accessible for research when conservation activity is required to support curators and researchers.
- **Disaster planning and salvage:** Planning and preparing the response to incidents which might threaten the collections, including salvage, recovery, remedial treatments, preventive measures and training.
- **Managing conservation by external conservators:** where there are no in-house conservation skills to treat objects, e.g. paper, books, photographs, textiles and fine art works. The museum will use external conservators or specialists with suitable experience and qualifications, eg Institute of Conservation Accredited Conservators.
- **Object movement and logistics:** specialist object handling to move and protect objects during movement.
- **Restoration:** Restoring of vehicles and objects to working order, so that they can be operated for the enjoyment and benefit of the museum's users. See interventive conservation above. Restoration requires greater intervention and could return an item to a state of better condition than when manufactured. Restoration risks the loss of

historic integrity and original fabric so is limited to those objects processed through the SMG Policy and Procedures for Selecting and Operating Historic Objects from the Collections of SMG (2013).

- **Training:** All CCC staff are trained to the required standards and Continuing Professional Development is an integral part of ensuring the skills base is appropriate and up to date to care for the collections. The CCC staff also provide training to SMG staff across a range of collections care and collection hazard issues.

6. Advice and support across the Museum

The conservation and collections care teams provide specialist CCC advice and training to support the following museum activities.

- Loans of objects to other institutions
- Loans of objects from other institutions, companies and individuals
- Clearance and installation of displays and exhibitions
- Design, construction and installation of exhibitions and displays
- Design, construction and preparation of storage areas for collections
- Public events held in museum galleries
- Public events involving the use of objects
- Replication of museum objects
- Research activity using museum objects
- Operation of historic objects from the museum collections

It is best practise for all collections based activities to include a conservator in the team, this is arranged via the head of conservation function at each museum. The conservator should be involved and consulted at the earliest opportunity. This enables the appropriate allocation of budgetary and staff resources.