

## **National Museum of Ireland**

### **Conservation Policy**

#### **Introduction**

The collections of the National Museum of Ireland contain several million artefacts and scientific specimens, archives and libraries. Caring for these collections is one of the fundamental duties of the Museum, which keeps its collections in posterity for the Irish nation.

The Museum's policy on conservation is based on a combination of preventative and remedial conservation, both designed to ensure the preservation of the Museum's collections.

*Preventative conservation* covers the measures necessary to retard or minimise deterioration of museum objects and specimens. The necessary preventive measures are based on a thorough understanding of how objects and specimens react to their environment and deteriorate physically and chemically.

*Remedial conservation* involves a treatment to an object or specimen to bring it to a more acceptable condition or state in order to stabilise it or enhance some aspects of its cultural or scientific value.

#### **1 Guiding Principles**

- 1.1 All conservation, both preventative and remedial, should be carried out by, or under the supervision of professional staff with appropriate qualifications and expertise.
- 1.2 All proceedings in respect of both preventative and remedial conservation should be carried out in line with current health and safety practices and should comply with relevant legislation. Threats to staff can come from chemicals and equipment used, working practices and the collections themselves.

#### **2 Preventative Conservation**

- 2.1 The Museum should strive to promote best practice in the handling of objects, minimising the risks to their long-term preservation.
- 2.2 The museum should strive to introduce measures to minimise the levels of pollutant gases and particulates coming into contact with the collections.
- 2.3 Conservation assessments should be carried out of the collections prior to acquisition, loan and display, and the condition of objects and specimens in the collections should be monitored.

- 2.4 Collections should only be kept in rooms or buildings which are structurally sound and where suitable environmental conditions can be maintained for the objects in question.
- 2.5 Non-collection material, including packing materials, should be stored separately from the collections.
- 2.6 Environmental conditions in all areas where collections are present should be monitored and recorded on a regular basis.
- 2.7 All areas of the buildings must be kept clean at all times, with particular care taken in the disposal of foodstuffs. Consumption of food is not permitted in areas where objects are stored or exhibited.
- 2.8 Any relocation of an object should result in it being placed in matching or improved environmental conditions. The Conservation Department should be informed of any such moves.
- 2.9 The Museum should control, when possible, any of the following factors which are shown to affect the welfare of any group of objects:- temperature, relative humidity, atmospheric gases, particulates, ultraviolet light, visible light, pests, handling.
- 2.10 The Museum should consider upgrading environmental control for objects when:-
  - a) objects are shown to be deteriorating and the cause is attributable to unsuitable environmental conditions;
  - b) storage and exhibition facilities are being upgraded
- 2.11 The Museum should not expose any of its collections to extremes of relative humidity or fluctuations in relative humidity, except where extremes can be shown to be beneficial to certain objects.
- 2.12 The Museum should not expose its collections to sustained high levels of ultraviolet light. Ultraviolet levels should be reduced to below 75 microwatts/lumen throughout the Museum.
- 2.13 The Museum should not expose pigmented and dyed objects to sustained high levels of visible light. For highly light sensitive objects on long-term exhibition, the maximum light level should be 50 lux. Such material on temporary exhibition should not be exposed to light levels above 80 lux. Other light sensitive material should not be exposed to light levels in excess of 300 lux. Storage areas should be kept in darkness when access is not required.
- 2.14 The museum should maintain precautionary procedures for the receipt of, and subsequent storage of organic artefacts which are capable of harbouring pests and thus infesting other objects.

- 2.15 All stored items should be raised off the floor of storage areas to reduce any threat by flooding and care should be taken to ensure that artefacts are not placed in vulnerable locations.

### **3 Remedial Conservation**

- 3.1 Remedial Conservation schedules should reflect research and exhibition needs, public access requirements, funding and staff resources and urgency of care.
- 3.2 Conservation of objects should take place with reference to the highest standards and guidelines published in the relevant literature.
- 3.3 All remedial conservation should be carried out with an awareness that some treatments could prejudice the future research value of an object.
- 3.4 All conservation measures undertaken at the NMI while objects and specimens are in its care should be fully documented.
- 3.5 Remedial Conservation will not be carried out on objects where ownership does not rest with the Museum, except in exceptional circumstances.

### **4 Disaster Planning**

- 4.1 The Museum should take measures over and above those necessary for routine protection of the collections, to provide emergency arrangements and facilities for use in the event of a disaster (such as fire, flood etc).

These measures include:-

The provision of a Collections Disaster Plan.

Provision of disaster response documentation in the form of an emergency procedures handbook to be held in relevant areas.

Provision of appropriate training in disaster protection and provision of suitable equipment and materials in disaster kits on all sites

Identification of external bodies whose services may be used in specific emergency situations.

This policy should be read alongside the separate National Museum of Ireland policies on loans and acquisitions.

The policy is for the period 2005 – 2010 and shall be subjected to review in 2010.