

Resource:

Main Collections Risks during Closure

This resource looks at how you can carry on caring for (and perhaps working with) your collections during closure period. Our Conservation Development Officer, Helena, has identified the 7 main risks to your collection and practical ways to manage these during this time.

These risks are present all the time, but in normal times we worry about them less because we are in the museum more often and feel able to react more quickly. We'll look at some resources for each of these issues below. Your time is limited so concentrate on the areas you feel are the biggest risk or biggest priority for your museum.

If you have any questions please contact: museum.development@bristol.gov.uk



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Main Risks to Collections

- Pests
- Dust
- Light
- Theft and Vandalism
- Fire
- Flood
- Damp and Mould

REMEMBER: Only do what you feel safe and comfortable doing.

Follow the government guidelines on safe working: wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and hot water, avoid touching your face, stay at least 2 metres from other people who are not from your household, and do not leave home if you have a new persistent dry cough or a fever.

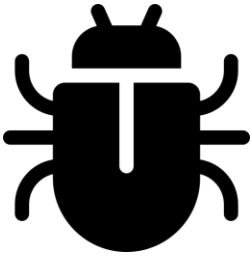
If you are able to access your museum, keep a record of everyone who works there with the date and times. If one of them does develop the virus, you will then be able to assess how long to quarantine anything they have worked with and areas which may need extra cleaning. If, hopefully, no-one develops the virus, the record of hours worked in the museum will be useful evidence, for example in future fundraising.

Top tips: Further reading:

Our new resource on [Keeping Your Museum and Collections Safe](#)

This includes things to do if you can't get access to your museum and, if you can get access to your museum, a handy checklist to help you prepare and prioritise tasks while you're there.

PESTS



This is the time of year when many species of pests are most active – young adults emerge to mate and lay eggs and with the museums closed their activities will have been undisturbed. Checking for pest activity will be a high priority when the museum reopens: looking at pest traps, looking at windowsills and dark, quiet areas and examining vulnerable objects carefully, especially textiles, fur and feather, leather, wood, paper and documents. A late spring-clean will help to remove dust and other debris which pests can feed on as well.

Really committed staff at English Heritage [have even been taking pest traps home](#) to carry on checking and identifying invaders. There is also an excellent [free Pest ID poster](#) available from English Heritage.

We've been running a Pest of the Month feature in our monthly newsletters. In the meantime, [you can find any you missed in our Resources section](#). We also have [guidance on freezing infested objects](#) and [dealing with woodworm](#).

If you find you have pest infested items or can't identify what you have caught, contact Helena Jaeschke, our Conservation Development Officer at Helena.jaeschke@exeter.gov.uk. We hope to start a project soon to help museums with any pest problems and organise a BugWatch across the southwest. Look out for news of Pest Partners coming soon!

DUST



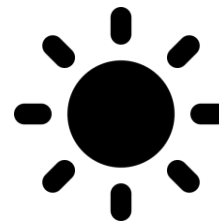
The lack of movement in the museum may have resulted in less dust being brought in or circulated, but the lack of regular cleaning may have allowed it to accumulate in places. Dust is abrasive, chemically active, attracts moisture from the air and is a good food source for pests. It may contain pest eggs and mould spores.

Any objects which are not in cases or boxes should be protected with a sheet of acid-free tissue or Tyvek fabric draped over as a dustcover. Don't use polythene sheet directly on objects as it encourages a buildup of damaging moisture next to the object. Polythene can be used over a tissue or light cotton dustsheet if you need leak protection.

Once you can work in the museum again, make it a priority to vacuum all areas and wipe down surfaces such as shelves, windowsills, doors and walls with a clean microfibre cloth, dry or slightly damp.

Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter to make sure tiny particles are trapped and empty it promptly. Bagless vacuums should be emptied after each use and the bagged debris taken outside the museum for quick disposal.

LIGHT



Although the lights will be off in many museums during lockdown, museum objects still need to be protected from daylight which will cause damage to organic materials and many painted or decorated surfaces.

Vulnerable objects such as textiles, photographs, watercolours, fur and feather should ideally be in the dark when not on active display, so it may be better to return them to safer conditions in storage if they have been left exposed.

If possible, close blinds or shield windows with card or paper. In rooms where the windows cannot be blocked off you can drape dustcloths over cases and acid free tissue over objects on open display.



THEFT AND VANDALISM

Keep a record of the movement (and new location) of any items and make sure this can be shared with other appropriate people from the museum. If possible, make sure vulnerable items are locked away securely.

Our [Security Guide resource](#) suggests possible ways to improve the surveillance of the museum even during closure.

Arts Council and the National Security Advisory team have released updated GIS guidance on [Meeting Security and Environmental Conditions](#). [Ecclesiastical Insurance](#) have published 5 priorities for managing temporarily closed or permanently unoccupied properties. Museums and Galleries Scotland have also produced a handy [security checklist](#).

FIRE



Your local Fire Service may have helpful information on their website – it's worth looking to see what advice they offer.

- [Gloucestershire Fire Service](#)
- [Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Fire Service](#)
- [Devon and Somerset Fire Service](#)
- [Cornwall Fire Service](#)
- [Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Service \(incl Swindon, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole\)](#)

In addition, London Fire Service has a dedicated [page of advice on fire avoidance for historic buildings and heritage sites](#).

There are some very helpful resources including [5 steps for emergency planning](#) from a fire service perspective.

If you can get to the outside of the museum, make sure to empty any rubbish and keep bins and waste materials away from the outside walls and doorways.

FLOOD



External flooding:

Fortunately the weather has been fairly dry for most of the lockdown period so far.

According to the [Met office](#), there may be some showers in early May, before settled weather returns.

However, it's always worth making sure you know what the risk of flooding could be and planning ahead. You can [sign up for flood warnings and check the flood risk](#) for your museum's postcode.

Internal flooding:

Is there any possibility of leaks from pipes or gutters/downspouts? If water is not needed in the building until the museum re-opens, is it possible to turn off the stopcock?

Make sure a note is left at the front desk to let others know if this has been done. If gutters and downspouts need clearing or repair, make sure this is a priority when normal service is resumed.

DAMP AND MOULD



If the heating has been turned off in the museum, the changing temperatures during day and night will have caused severe fluctuations in the relative humidity of the air, so it is very likely to have exceeded 65% at night. In addition, the lack of ventilation in closed museums may make it easier for damp air to stagnate and mould colonies to begin to grow.

You can expect to find colonies of mould growing on surfaces where condensation can form, such as smooth walls and glass, and on surfaces which have dust or grease deposits including display cases, handles and objects. Look for small fuzzy patches of brown, grey or white.

What to do if you find mould in the museum:

- Wear **impermeable gloves** and, ideally an **FFP3 rated face mask**, especially if you have any breathing issues or notice any symptoms such as itchy eyes or nose. Repeated exposure to mould spores can cause sensitisation so make sure you are protected.
- Smooth surfaces in the museum (not objects) can be cleaned effectively by wiping with clean **microfibre cloths**, either dry or slightly damp. Bag the used cloths and wash them in a **hot wash**. Do not use fabric conditioner when washing microfibre cloths as it blocks the tiny gaps which make them effective.
- Be very **careful when wiping the glass of frames** – vigorous rubbing can create static which can attract loose fragments of paint or ink to the underside of the glass. Do not wipe the glass of pastel paintings or any framed work which has a loose or powdery surface.
- Ideally, objects should be put in a **safe space to dry out the mould**. Lay a sheet of acid-free tissue over the surface to protect the object. When the mould is dry and powdery, use a very soft brush to brush it off into the nozzle of a **vacuum with a HEPA filter**. Protect the nozzle of the vacuum with a piece of net or tights, held on with a rubber band and don't let the nozzle touch the object.

Collections Trust

On 7th April, the Collections Trust held a Question and Answer session on YouTube on “**Collections Care in Lockdown**” with a panel of collection care professionals, including our Collections Development Officer, Helena Jaeschke. [Watch the video and read the transcript.](#)

Collections Trust also have a [range of related resources](#) and continue to help museums with documentation issues. They have suggested ways you can keep active on this, even if you can't get into your museum or access your documentation online.

Also they have launched a 'Spectrum Book Club' which began with Object Entry.

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