

This resource from our Conservation Development Officer, Helena Jaeschke, will help you build on the lessons of the Covid-19 lockdowns to prepare for any future unexpected closures.

In March 2020, museums had to close for a national lockdown in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since then, subsequent local or national changes to public restrictions and the unplanned absences of staff members, both paid and volunteer, have meant some museums have repeatedly had to close at short notice, sometimes for extensive periods.

Very few museums had included this sudden, unplanned closure as a separate procedure in their **Emergency Plan (EP)** and as a result had to cobble together their response under pressure. Now is the time to examine your EP and see how it can be improved to make future closures easier and less stressful. First, gather as much information from your team as you can about what worked and what could have been improved. What have you learned over the past months? Invite everyone to contribute and, if possible, see if it is possible to gather some experiences from visitors. How did they check whether the museum was open? Was the information reliable? Were people able to offer help when it was needed?

These procedures will help the museum in a range of circumstances, so the work done now will be of great value. You might like to consider the following headings and prompts:



Immediate:



If the museum is told it must close immediately, what is the absolute minimum that must be done? Is there anything that would make this easier, such as a checklist or case of essentials to take away? What information do you need to have while you are outside the building? Are the contact details, including your insurance policy, up to date? Are any payments due which are not paid automatically? Is there a copy of the Emergency Plan offsite? Are your Evacuation procedures appropriate?

If there's more time:



Close cupboards and internal doors. Remove food from the museum. Don't forget to empty the waste bins if you can and put the rubbish outside the building. Clean filters. Make sure pests traps are in appropriate places and have space for new arrivals. Take photographs of the interior. Think about what you will need on return (e.g. cleaning materials, personal protective equipment) and make sure it will be easy to find.

Security:



How will the building be kept safe? Do you need to change your keyholders or recall some of the keys? Will interior keys be kept safe (e.g. in a locked key cupboard)? Can anyone check the outside of the building when it is closed? Sometimes neighbours can help if they know who to tell when they spot something of concern. Who will be able to make occasional visits? Do they have a checklist of things that need to be looked at or tasks during their visit? For example, checking security cameras, emptying dehumidifiers, looking for signs of damage or change. Do the Police and Fire Service know that the building will be empty and how to contact you?

**Communications:**

How will you let people know that the museum is closed and when it will reopen? Who needs to know? Do you need signs? Who will update the website, social media accounts and sites like Google Maps or TripAdvisor? Do you need an emergency communications channel such as a WhatsApp group so people can stay in touch? Are contact lists up to date? How will you stay in touch with volunteers, support them and enable people to help the museum while it is closed?

**Equipment:**

What equipment needs to stay on at all times (e.g. dehumidifiers)? What can be switched off and unplugged? Remember to empty fridges and clean them, then leave the door wedged slightly ajar. Do any items need batteries changing to make sure they continue running? Do any small items need to be locked away out of sight? Make sure you have names of makes, models and suppliers in case you need help.

**Records:**

Is the off-site copy of the Accessions Register up-to-date and is it secure? Will the right people be able to access it during closure? Is there computer equipment which needs to be kept off-site during closure? Is it secure?

**Working Remotely:**

What tasks will you be able to carry out while the museum is closed? Some museums have spent the time transcribing written documents and uploading object information to their online catalogues or creating content for social media. Others had volunteers making costumes, object pads and cushions and other useful items. What will you need to be able to do this? Keep records of all actions during the closure and think about what items you might like to collect to tell the story of this part of the museum's life.

**Reopening:**

What will be needed before you can reopen? Do you need a cleaning team? Is there a checklist of tasks and equipment? Take photographs of the interior so you can check if anything has changed. Check equipment to make sure it is working properly and change batteries, clean filters etc, as required.

And Finally...

When you have gathered all the information, draft and discuss the procedures and update your Emergency Plan. Make sure to replace all copies of the EP with the new version. Congratulate everyone involved and celebrate!