

# Emergency planning for collections

## Definition

Managing information about potential risks to all the objects in your care, and the action to be taken in emergency situations.

## Scope

Use this procedure well before you are faced with a real emergency that might harm collections or your information systems. The first thing to do is to list the risks you face, such as fire and flooding. Then plan to make these things less likely to happen, and less damaging if they do.

Once you have assessed the risks you can put together an emergency plan for collections in your care (which should be developed along with your wider planning for human safety in emergency situations). In the heat of the moment it can be hard to think straight, so have clear, written instructions ready to be grabbed by anyone who needs them. Use drills to test your emergency plan, so that everyone knows what to do even if key people are not around when trouble strikes (as they might not be). This procedure might not stop a disaster, but it will help you react and recover. If the worst does happen, see also ***Damage and loss***.

## The Spectrum standard

You should have a **policy** on how you will protect collections in emergencies. This could either be a standalone document or part of a wider collections management policy. Either way, in deciding your policy you will need to consider these questions:

- Who is responsible for emergency planning within your museum?
- What agreements do you have to co-operate with other museums in emergency situations?
- How do you assess risk and what level of risk do you consider tolerable?
- What are your priorities for mitigating the risks you have identified?
- What risks will you insure against (or seek indemnity cover for)?
- Who has access to the full emergency plan (particularly if it includes confidential information such as lists of the most valuable objects in your collection)?

- Who will be trained to put the emergency plan into action?
- What is the chain of command in an emergency (including if key people are not around)?
- How will you test the effectiveness of the emergency plan and keep it up to date?

You should also have a written **procedure** that explains the steps to follow to reduce risks, and how to react to emergencies. Spectrum's suggested procedure is a useful starting point, but however you do it, your own procedure should meet the following minimum requirements:

| Minimum requirement                                                                                                                                                  | Why this is important                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| You assess the risks facing collections and information systems, and review these regularly in line with your policy.                                                | Your governing body can make informed decisions about safeguarding your objects and data.                                                                          |
| You have multiple copies of a written emergency plan that will help you respond effectively to all foreseeable emergencies (with at least one copy safely off-site). | You have clear steps to follow so you will not forget something important in a real emergency.<br><br>You do not lose your only copy of the plan in an emergency.  |
| You always have access to up-to-date contact details for the people and organisations named in your emergency plan.                                                  | You do not waste time tracking down the people you need urgently.                                                                                                  |
| You have prioritised the objects you would save first in an emergency, and recorded this information in a way that can guide any rescue that may be possible.        | You are able to move objects to safety in a planned way that reflects their value to you.                                                                          |
| All your staff and volunteers know, and have practised, what they should do in all of the situations covered by your emergency plan.                                 | Whoever is first on the scene can react quickly, efficiently and safely.<br><br>You are not relying on someone who happens to be on holiday when disaster strikes. |

## Suggested procedure

### Assessing risk

Assess the risks to objects in your care.

Carry out an assessment on the risks to objects in your care in various categories of emergency situation (eg isolated incident, museum-wide crisis) (see also **Note 1**). This assessment should consider:

- Potential risks to objects from their present location (eg theft, flood, fire, vandalism, inappropriate environmental conditions).
- Additional risks to objects that cannot easily be moved from their present location (eg because they are very large, fragile or heavy).
- Potential risk objects pose to other objects or people (eg poison arrow heads, petrol in engines, silver nitrate film).

Record the **Document location** of this assessment, so that it can easily be found and referred to.

### Create plan for minimising the risks, with recommendations.

The assessment may lead to plans for minimising these risks, such as:

- Repair and maintenance of buildings.
- Re-housing of objects.
- Changes in general housekeeping routines.
- Changes in handling, storage (including materials and equipment), environmental or security recommendations of objects.
- Reassessment of insurance arrangements.
- Review of collecting policy.
- Policy of recording key information required in the event of loss, including photographs (see the Object ID website for an example of such information).
- Reassessment of your policy and practice in access to and the use of collections.
- Conservation of the object.

Record the **Document location** of these recommendations, so that they can easily be found and referred to.

You should have in place a system of good building maintenance and housekeeping which will reduce the risk of disaster and enable it to be better prepared to cope should problems occur. Identify and list good collections care and housekeeping practices such as cleaning routines, storage standards (eg storing collections at least 15cm off the ground).

### Put the recommendations into action.

Put the recommendations into action by addressing the risks in one of the following ways:

- **Toleration** (for example the cost of taking an action may be prohibitive and the organisation may prefer to tolerate this level of risk).
- **Transfer** (some risks may be transferable, eg by taking out insurance).

- **Termination** (it may be best to stop some activities if they pose too great a risk).
- **Treatment** (many risks fall in this category, and taking mitigating action can ensure the level of risk is controlled).
- **Taking the opportunity** (this recognises that risk management is an opportunity not only to mitigate threats but also to exploit positive opportunities).

### Review risk assessment regularly.

You should review the risk assessment agreed intervals to ensure up-to-date action points and assessment of new risks.

## Creating an emergency plan

### List key people and their emergency contact details.

Identify and list the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the following (with personal contact details handled in line with your data protection policy):

- Site managers, key holders and other relevant staff (or volunteers). The plan should mention specific roles assigned (eg incident lead, incident co-ordinator, quartermaster, documenter) with back-ups in case the relevant people are not available.
- Essential utility companies.
- Contracted companies (eg fire and security companies).
- Professional services to be called upon (eg glaziers, plumbers, locksmiths, pest control, disaster response companies, freezing and drying services, valuers, removers and transport hire).

If it is your policy to insure collections, list the contact names and addresses of relevant organisations and individuals.

### List the locations to be used in the case of evacuation.

Identify and list the locations to be used in the case of evacuation. This may include off-site locations including somewhere to coordinate your response to an emergency if you cannot access your usual offices. A low-cost option is to arrange reciprocal agreements with neighbouring organisations.

### Record priority codes for removing objects from an emergency area.

Establish and record priority codes identifying objects for immediate removal from the affected area. These codes should be listed in the plan. It may be appropriate to mark locations and/or boxes with these codes, or else produce inventories of objects or collections in order of salvage priority.

## **Draw up site plans.**

Draw up site plans to show:

- Annotations with location codes for each building/space.
- Emergency access and exit points.
- Location of utility supply routes and cut-off points.
- Location of emergency equipment (eg security system panels, fire extinguishers, first aid equipment, salvage equipment).
- Location of hazardous areas, with hazards (eg objects containing small amounts of radioactive material or asbestos) described and quantified in enough detail to allow appropriate risk assessment by emergency services.
- Location of collections and salvage priority list.

These plans should be confidential and up-to-date, with a copy being made available to emergency services on their arrival (and copies kept off-site). They need to be clear and simple if they are to be of value in an emergency situation.

## **Identify and list equipment you might need in an emergency.**

Identify and list equipment which may be needed in the case of an emergency based on risk assessment of most likely scenarios. Note the location of the salvage stores (keeping in mind that if everything is in one store, that location might not be accessible in the event of a major emergency).

## **Note immediate steps to care for objects after an emergency.**

Establish and record immediate measures to be followed in the event of having to care for objects following an emergency (eg raise alarm, call emergency services, or evacuate collections). This should include measures to protect collections still housed within damaged buildings.

## **Note first aid steps for damaged objects, by material.**

Establish and record first aid measures for damaged collections, by type of material, drawn up in consultation with conservators. Appropriate materials and equipment should be available to support these measures.

## **Note the backup location of core inventory information.**

Establish and record the location of a duplicate copy of the inventory information to account for objects immediately after the emergency. Procedures should be in place for the backup of collections information.

**Compile this information into an easy-to-follow emergency plan.**

Record the **Document location** of the emergency plan, and any other separate documents created, so that they can easily be found and referred to. Include the locations of secure, off-site backup copies.

## Staying prepared

**Train all staff and volunteers in how to put the emergency plan into action, and practise regularly.**

Provide training to new and existing staff and volunteers to ensure that emergency plan can be put into action. This should include updating knowledge and training to cover changes to buildings, policy, plans, police cover, risk and types of risk. You should specify the intervals when this training should take place.

**Review the emergency plan regularly.**

The plan should be reviewed at agreed intervals (which should be no less than annually) and updated immediately to reflect changes in key personnel, procedures, locations, and any heightened risks associated with building work or similar activities.

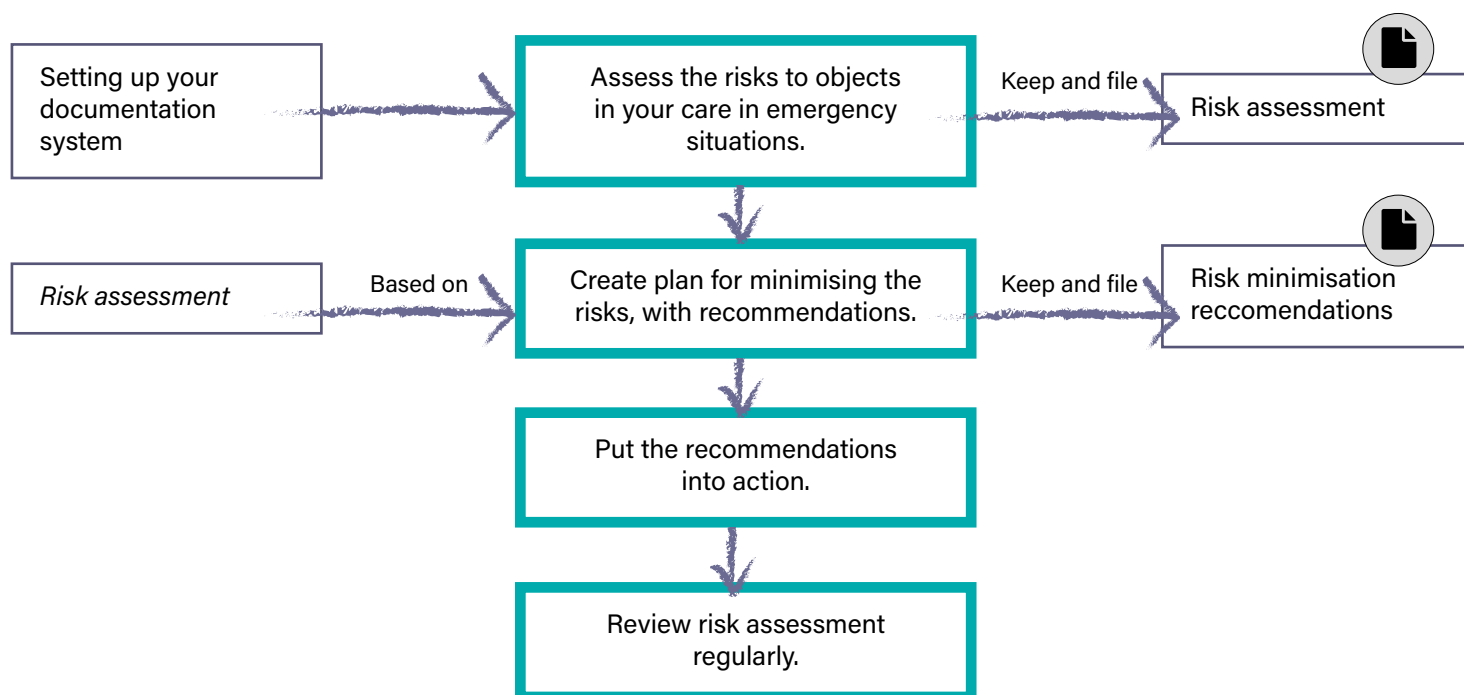
## Guidance notes

### Note 1: Risk registers

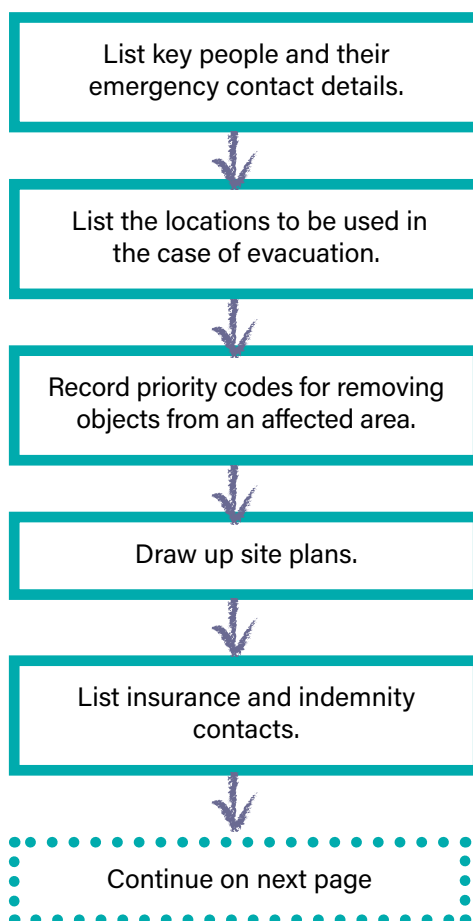
This procedure should form part of your museum's overall risk management strategy. Many organisations maintain a risk register detailing the key risks that it faces. As new risks are identified or eliminated, the register is updated accordingly. As many of the risks listed will also be relevant to collections, this is a good place to start. Likewise, following any review of risk to collections, ensure that your register is updated as necessary.

# Emergency planning for collections

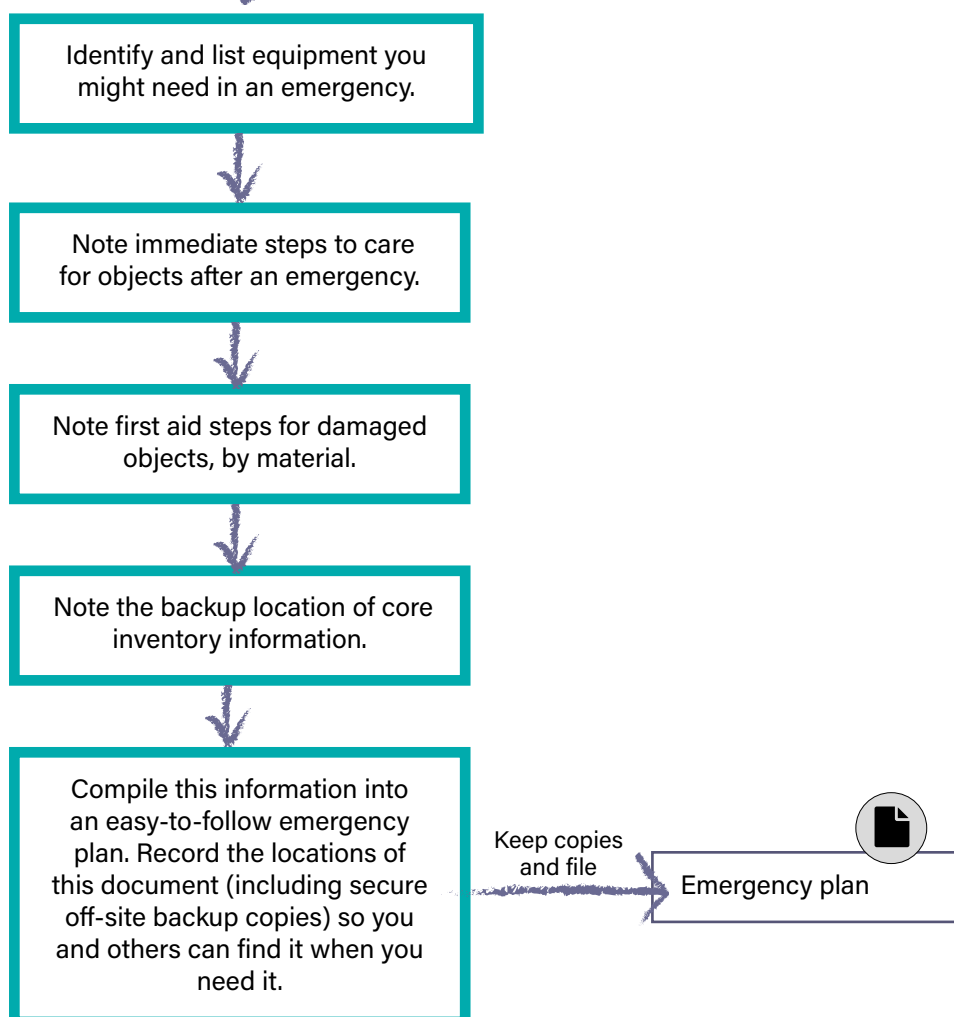
## Assessing risk



## Creating an emergency plan



Continued from  
**Creating an  
emergency plan**



## Staying prepared

