

PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION OF COLLECTIONS IN STORAGE

A user-friendly assessment tool for museum storage

In the framework of the UNESCO-ICCROM project component on museum storage, our first objective was to create a user-friendly assessment tool for museum storage. This would take the form of a self-assessment checklist of maximum 100 questions on the conditions, arrangement and management of the collections storage in the museum.

The objective of this tool is to enable museums which decide to re-organize their storage to score the current situation, and identify if and where improvements are needed in order to ensure the best use and conservation of the collections.

The development of this self-assessment checklist contributes to the final objective of this UNESCO-ICCROM project which is, by 2009, the dissemination of tools to analyze and improve conditions of collections in storage for their preservation and use.

The following tool was prepared by ICCROM on the basis of the study and review of a number of questionnaires and checklists prepared in the framework of past projects in the field of storage management. 10 revisions were necessary to reach the final proposal.

Care was taken in organizing the questions around the 5 themes which will also structure the future training component of this project (to take place in 2007-2008). The original idea of using 100 questions was down-sized to 43 in order to keep the user attention focused on the fundamental issues, and to avoid a lengthy, mechanical and de-motivating answering process.

The user profile is described briefly in the page one of the questionnaire, which also includes the recapitulation Table, brief instructions and a recommendation to carry out the process in team, and with the support of the Museum Director.

Each of the 43 points describes the basic standard to be achieved, followed by maximum four choices to describe the current situation. We allocated different weight to different “scenarios” in order to give a higher score to those aspects which are crucial to the safeguard and the management of the collections. The recapitulation Table on page 11 of the questionnaire allows the “user” to circle the final scores and to assess immediately “how good is the situation of the storage”, thanks to a color code.

In the next phases of the ICCROM-UNESCO project, it is planned to use this tool and assess it, before its final posting on the respective institutional website for free consultation and use.

UNESCO and ICCROM developed this tool for the staff of the smaller museums...

- WHO believe that collections in storage can play an important role for the education and enjoyment of the public
- WHO do not have immediate access to professional expertise to assess and advise on what to do
- WHO want to make the most of the available resources, be human, material or financial
- WHO want to assess the current situation by themselves and identify what is good and what needs improvement.

The following questionnaire is organized into 5 sections, each dedicated to a fundamental aspect of the storage of museum collections

- A.** Your collections in storage, its quantification, documentation and consultation
- B.** Your storage building and space
- C.** Your Storage units and supports
- D.** The storage environment and equipment
- E.** The staff and procedures

Filing this questionnaire should take a maximum of one hour if you know well your situation. It is better if you do this in team with a colleague. It is also better if you get the support of your Museum Director.

How to proceed?

- For each of the questions, there are two to four possible answers. In the answers, very often, we use the word 'most', like in 'most of the objects'. This means 'more than half of your collections'.
- Each answer has a score: '6', '4', '3', '2', '1' or '0'. Write the score in the box beside the question. Sum the scores for each part A, B, C, D, and E and mark the final results in the relevant columns on the table page 11.

A. Collections, quantification, documentation, consultation

A.1. Each object is identified with a number which is reported on the object and on the museum accession register

- 6 Yes, for every object
- 4 For most objects
- 2 Most objects are not inventoried nor documented
- 0 No, the objects are not inventoried nor documented

A.2. The documentation for each object includes the dimensions and the weight of the object

- 6 Yes, for each object
- 4 For most objects
- 2 Dimensions and weight of most objects are not in the documentation
- 0 No, dimensions and weight of objects are not in the documentation

A.3. The documentation for each object includes a list of the materials of the object

- 3 Yes, for each object
- 2 For most objects
- 1 For most objects, this information is not included in the documentation
- 0 No, list of materials is not included in the documentation

A.4. All storage rooms, aisles, and individual storage units are numbered and labelled (and it is visible)

- 3 Yes, all of them
- 2 Most of them
- 1 Most of the spaces and furniture are not numbered and labeled
- 0 There is no numbering and labeling system

A.5. The location for each object in the storage area is designated and recorded in the documentation

- 6 The location for each object is designated and recorded
- 4 The location of most objects is designated and recorded
- 2 The location of most objects is not recorded
- 0 Objects do not have designated locations and records of location

A.6. Objects are accessible in a manner that keeps handling to the minimum

- 3 A maximum of 3 objects must be handled in order to obtain the one desired
- 2 Sometimes more than 3 objects must be handled
- 1 Most objects must usually be handled to reach the one desired
- 0 The objects are inaccessible

A.7. The museum uses a register to document the movement of any object between storage areas and other locations: display, research, labs, loan, other institutions and other countries

- 3 Yes
- 0 No

A.8. It should be possible to see the objects in the storage units with a minimum of handling

- 3 All objects are clearly visible
- 2 Most objects are clearly visible, visibility of others is difficult
- 1 Visibility of most objects is difficult
- 0 Visibility of the objects is very poor

A.9. Time required to physically locate an object from the information in the documentation system should be kept to minimum

- 3 All objects can be located in less than 3 minutes
- 2 Most objects can be obtained within 3 to 10 minutes
- 1 Most objects requires at least 10 minutes to be located
- 0 Most objects are not physically localizable from the current documentation system

Total of part A

Report this score in column A on the table page 11

B. Building and space

B.1. The collection storage areas are located in one specific space

- 6 The collection storage areas are in one specific space in the museum
- 4 The collections storage areas are in different spaces of the museum but they are well connected with the museum activities
- 2 The collection storage areas are dispersed throughout the museum
- 0 Collections are also stored in corridors and offices, or wherever there is space

B.2. A space outside the storage areas is dedicated to temporary holding and preparation of collections for storage

- 3 Yes, there is a dedicated space
- 1 There is no dedicated space but when necessary, it can be arranged
- 0 Temporary holding and preparation of collections happens IN storage areas

B.3. The museum has a dedicated space for research and consultation

- 3 Yes, there is a dedicated space
- 1 There is no research area, but when necessary, it can be arranged.
- 0 Research happens IN the storage areas.

B.4. It is safe and easy to move the collections from the storage areas to the related areas of the museum (exhibition, conservation workshop, etc.)

- 3 The route between the loading area and other functional areas and the storage locations is free of obstacles and suited to movement of the largest objects, or of objects loaded on a cart
- 2 Routes include corners and movement between floors, but without obstacles
- 1 Routes include corners and movement between floors, with obstacles
- 0 Routes are extremely difficult or obstructed

B.5. Packing materials, old display panels and furniture, publications and other materials are NOT stored in the collections storage areas.

- 6 The storage areas are exclusively dedicated to collections
- 2 Most of the space is dedicated to collections
- 0 Most of the storage space is occupied by materials other than collections

B.6. *There is enough space between the storage units for a person to move safely, either with one object in hands, or when carrying a cart full of objects*

- 3 Yes, there is enough space
- 2 Between most of the storage units, there is enough space to move collections safely
- 1 Between most of the storage units, it is difficult to move collections safely
- 0 It is difficult to move collections safely anywhere in the storage area

B.7. *Carts, trays, ladders are available in each storage area, at all time*

- 3 Yes, there is such equipment in each storage area
- 1 Some equipment exist but is not specific to the storage areas
- 0 No there is no such equipment

B.8. *The volume of the storage area is sufficient for the collections*

- 6 Yes
- 0 No

B.9. *In five years time, considering the rate of acquisition of the collections, there is still sufficient space for the collections in the storage areas and in the storage*

- 3 Yes
- 0 No

Total of part B

Report this score in column B on the table page 11

C. Storage units and supports

C.1. No object is directly on the ground:

- 6 Yes
- 4 A few objects are placed directly on the floor, for specific reasons
- 2 Most of the objects are placed directly on the floor without justification
- 0 All the objects are on the floor

C.2. The storage units are sufficient to hold all the collection:

- 6 Yes,
- 4 Most of the storage units are not fully used
- 2 Most of the storage units are full
- 0 Storage units are overcrowded

C.3. The dimensions of the storage units are adapted to the dimensions of the objects

- 3 Yes, for all the storage units
- 2 For most of the storage units
- 0 The storage units dimensions are not adapted to the dimensions of the objects they hold

C.4. The storage unit materials are pest-proofed:

- 3 Yes
- 1 Most storage units are pest-proofed
- 0 No, most of the storage units are vulnerable to pest infestation

C.5. Special objects (very small, very fragile, flexible, etc.) have appropriate boxes, padding, supports and other packaging materials

- 3 Yes, all the 'special objects'
- 2 Most of the objects
- 1 Some of the objects
- 0 No boxes, padding, support and other conditioning materials are allocated to the 'special' objects

Total of part C

Report this score in column C on the table page 11

D. Environment and Equipment

D.1. The building envelope provides adequate protection from the exterior weather

- 6 Yes, the building envelope protects against all rain and weather extremes
- 4 The building envelope has minor flaws
- 2 The building envelope cannot block the weather extremes
- 0 The building envelope is in very poor conditions

D.2. In your opinion, the walls, floors and ceiling of the storage are in good conditions?

- 3 Yes, the walls, floors and ceiling are in good conditions
- 2 There are visible signs of past deterioration (water stains, cracks, etc.)
- 1 There are visible signs of current deterioration (damp walls and ceiling, condensation) or defects (improper electric wiring, faulty plumbing, etc.)
- 0 The walls, floors and ceiling are in very poor conditions

D.3. Climate is monitored in the museum storage

- 3 The climate in storage is measured and analyzed regularly
- 2 The climate in storage is measured on a regular basis and not analyzed
- 1 The climate in the storage is measured on occasion
- 0 The climate in the storage is not measured

D.4. In your opinion the climate in the storage is appropriate for the collections:

- 3 Yes
- 2 For most of the collections, the climate is appropriate
- 1 I don't know
- 0 For most of the collections, the climate is not appropriate

D.5. Objects and storage units are dust-free

- 3 Yes
- 2 Most of them
- 1 Some of them
- 0 No, everything is covered in dust

D.6. No pest infest objects

- 6 All the collections is pest-free
- 1 Most of the collections are in good condition; some are infested
- 0 Most objects are infested

D.7. The storage area is cleaned regularly

- 3 Cleaned regularly (once or more per week)
- 2 Cleaned occasionally (once or more per month)
- 1 Rarely cleaned(once every 6 months)
- 0 Never cleaned

D.8. Access to storage areas is controlled

- 3 Entrance to storage is controlled
- 1 Entrance is not controlled but is restricted to museum staff
- 0 Entrance is not controlled and not restricted to staff

D.9. Entrance points on exterior walls

- 3 No doors or windows on exterior walls
- 0 Entrance points on exterior walls

D.10. Doors and windows are secure (security locks, security grills)

- 3 All doors and windows
- 1 Some doors or some windows
- 0 None of the doors or windows is secure...

D.11. The storage area is located in a zone with no risks of flood

- 6 The storage location is considered at zero or low risk of flooding
- 4 The location is subject to some risk of flooding
- 2 The location is at risk
- 0 Floods in the storage occur regularly

D.12. The locations avoid water, steam and drainage pipes, and water taps

- 3 There are no pipes and no water taps in the storage areas
- 2 There are no exposed pipes or water taps
- 1 There are exposed pipes and water taps
- 0 There are pipes and they are more than 30 years old

D.13. Fire detection

- 3 Detectors are installed, regularly checked and in working order
- 1 Detectors are installed but not regularly checked
- 0 There are no detectors

D.14. Fire suppression systems

- 6 The museum has adequate fire suppression devices, regularly checked and any staff knows how to operate manual devices
- 2 The museum has a fire suppression system, but it is not checked regularly
- 0 There are no fire suppression systems

Total of part D

Report this score in column D on the table page 11

E. Staff and procedures

E.1. One person is officially in charge of the storage areas

- 6 Yes and his/her duties and responsibilities are written down
- 2 Yes, but no job description
- 0 No

E.2. Sufficient staff is allocated to the storage areas

- 3 Yes
- 0 No

E.3. Staff is appropriately instructed and trained

- 3 Yes
- 0 No

E.4. Written procedures for the storage are known by all staff and include rules (entering, retrieving and relocating an object, cleaning and maintenance, control of visitors, etc.)

- 3 Yes
- 2 For most of the aspects
- 1 For few aspects only
- 0 No, there are no written procedures

E.5. The storage area is inspected regularly

- 3 Yes (at least one a year)
- 0 No

E.6. The museum has a written Emergency preparedness plan

- 3 There is an emergency plan, regularly updated and practiced by the staff
- 1 There is an emergency plan but it is not updated nor practiced by staff
- 0 There is no emergency plan

Total of part E

Report this score in column E on the table page 11

How good is your storage for protecting and using the museum collections?

A	B	C	D	E
36	36	21	54	21
35	35		53	
34	34	20	52	20
33	33		51	
32	32	19	50	19
31	31		49	
30	30	18	48	18
29	29		47	
28	28	17	46	17
			45	
27	27	16	44	16
26	26		43	
25	25	15	42	15
24	24		41	
23	23	14	40	14
22	22		39	
21	21	13	38	13
20	20		37	
19	19	12	36	12
			35	
18	18	11	34	11
17	17		33	
16	16	10	32	10
15	15		31	
14	14	9	30	9
13	13		29	
12	12	8	28	8
11	11		27	
10	10	7	26	7
			25	
9	9	6	24	6
8	8		23	
7	7	5	22	5
6	6		21	
5	5	4	20	4
4	4		19	
3	3	3	18	3
2	2		17	
1	1	2	16	2
			15	
0	0	1	14	1
			13	
		0	12	0
			11	
			10	
			9	
			8	
			7	
			6	
			5	
			4	
			3	
			2	
			1	
			0	

Great! Your storage is fine
Small Improvements are needed
Need for a reorganization plan
Your collection in storage is at risk!

Congratulations for this assessment!
Your museum can now decide what to do for the collections in storage!