

GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING SALVAGE PRIORITIES

The collection priorities list is meant to be a guide. Consider the circumstances and limiting factors (access to materials, extent of damage, time, availability of resources, etc.) that may require deviations from the plan.

1. Assemble an appropriate team to establish salvage priorities. Knowledge of the collection is essential as are the administrative requirements for business continuity. The team must reach a consensus *before* a disaster. Lack of an action plan will result in a lack of direction, ultimately resulting in wasted time and the very real possibility of collection loss.
2. Develop criteria from which prioritization will be determined. There are a few guidelines available to facilitate this thought process. See below for an example of established criteria.
3. Make a list and discuss items that meet the criteria. Don't try to prioritize item by item; do it by groups of materials. These are decisions that will be highly individual to each institution. A library might use subject areas or call numbers; an archives use record groups; and a museum use material groupings.

Established Criteria

Heritage Preservation's *Field Guide to Emergency Response* guidelines:

Decide which objects, collections, and records are vital to your organization. These should be the highest priorities for salvage. For example:

- Objects and collections that are central to the institution's mandate, mission, services, and programs
- Essential records – bibliographic and collection catalogs, inventories, electronic storage devices, personnel, and financial
- Items of high historic, scholarly, or monetary value
- Objects or collections that are impossible or difficult to replace

Staff and personnel records necessary to continue payroll and operations should also be prioritized. It is strongly recommended that these types of records be duplicated (electronic backups) and stored off-site to prevent their irretrievable loss. Also, do not forget to include objects for which the institution has legal obligations, such as loans or conditional gifts.

To create the lists of priorities, identify the collections or the objects, note their location and include any security and display information that will allow for speedy removal. Both the list of prioritized collections and security information should be considered sensitive information. Consider carefully what information to include in the distributed plan. If kept separate, make it easily accessible by the salvage team and to share with the local fire department in case of an event. Floor plans with priority collection areas highlighted and/or pictured can be especially useful during a response.

Once a list is established, it is useful to sort by location or collection type. For example, objects housed in a vault may have one list of priorities, while archival collections housed in a library may be better served by another list. This way if there is a minor or localized event in the building, the affected collection will have its own prioritized list. Similarly, in the event of a major disaster, separate salvage efforts can ideally be in effect simultaneously.

It may also be useful to create different levels, or ranks, of prioritized objects. HIGH priority may include objects that have higher vulnerability and require immediate treatment or be essential records. MODERATE priority may contain objects that, while a high priority, may just need to be checked and treatment could be delayed until everything at a HIGH priority has been assessed and treated. LOWER priority could be objects of slightly lower priority or those that are so large as to be difficult to move or treat (e.g., mural-sized painting, large sculpture).

Think ahead about what preparations might help with emergency evacuation of priority collections (e.g., color-coded dots or reflective tape on shelving/boxes, grouping together priority objects, marking priorities on floor plans). Each institution must determine the best system to fit its needs. Update the list of collection priorities frequently to account for incoming/ outgoing loans, stack shifting, exhibit changes, new storage locations, etc.