

Notes from the Home Front: Care & Handling of Heirloom Textiles

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Textile Conservator
ICA – Art Conservation



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ICA History

We are the oldest non-profit regional conservation center in the United States, celebrating over 60 years of service



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ICA is a full-service nonprofit art and artifact conservation center.



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In Ohio alone there are 75 historic house properties or heritage sites with collections.



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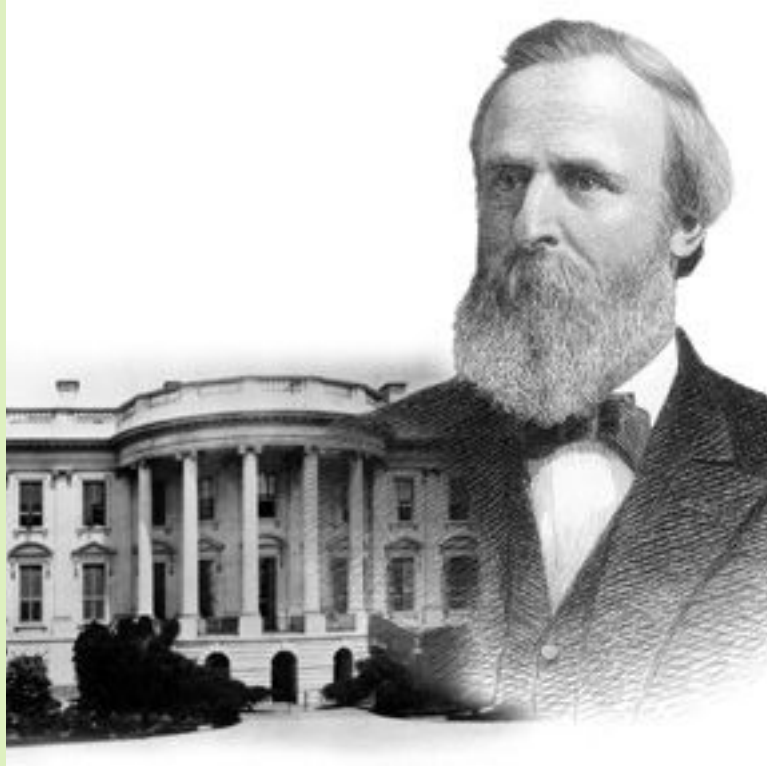
House museums range from grand estates to modest frame structures now caught within urban landscapes.



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They are homes built by Presidents
as well as farmers.



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The most effective preventative care program starts with the house itself.

- Understanding agents of deterioration
- Evaluation of current conditions



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Maintenance of the historic house is as important as preserving its collections.

- Sources of heat
- Sources of moisture
- Sources for pest entry
- Sources of pollutants



Begin by evaluating your “envelope”.



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A preventative conservation plan can help identify and minimize risks to textiles.

- Textile and paper objects are among the most sensitive in museum collections.
- They are negatively affected by uncontrolled exposure to light, humidity, and temperature.
- A house museum's textiles are susceptible to damage from dirt, mold, insects, and visitors.



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Collections may include a variety of personal and decorative objects.



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Textiles can consist of a variety of fibers and materials, all with different characteristics.

- Natural (silk, wool, cotton, linen)
- Synthetic or man-made
- Leather, fur, and feathers
- Plastics
- Metal and metal-wrapped threads



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All aspects of an item are affected by environmental conditions.

- Construction techniques
- Special finishes
- Decorations and embellishments



The role of preventive conservation is to avoid, block, or minimize the agents of deterioration.

- Light
- Temperature & Humidity
- Pollution
- Pests



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Light damage is cumulative and irreversible.



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Guidelines for Light Reduction

- The maximum brightness recommended for textiles is 50 lux or footcandles.
- All UV light sources should be filtered where possible.
- Consider automatic dimmer switches, or simply turning out lights when visitors are not present.



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Update the artificial light sources in your display cases and rooms.



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Consider LED bulbs to eliminate heat & reduce radiation.

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Realistic Temperature and RH Ranges for Textiles

- Store textiles at temperatures between 65° and 75° F and relative humidity as close to 50% as possible.
- (Mold growth begins around 65% RH.)



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Temperature extremes and fluctuations are destructive to dyes and fibers.



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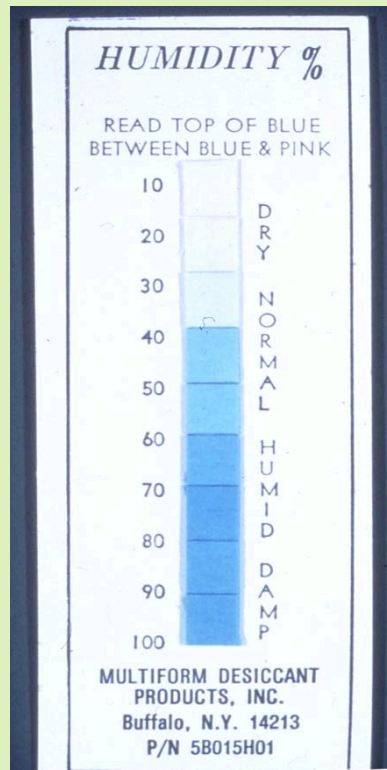
High temperature together with high humidity levels promote biological activity.



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Low-cost meters make monitoring multiple areas affordable.



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Guidelines for Humidity Reduction:

- Fans to circulate air
- Dessicants
- Window treatments
- Consult your handouts for mold outbreaks.



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**Dirt disfigures, dulls, and stains textiles,
causing its character to change completely.**



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Pollutants also affect dyes, finishes,
and many embellishments.



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Guidelines for Reduction of Pollutants:

- Keep windows and doors closed during pollen seasons.
- Protect sensitive objects with dust covers when rooms are not open to the public.
- Check for drafts of excess air, where particulate matter may accumulate.
- Make sure seams around windows are properly sealed.
- Seal construction work areas with sheets of plastic to reduce airborne dust.



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Identify pests that feed on textiles.





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Guidelines for Reduction of Pests:

- Practice regular housekeeping plan attracted to reduce temptation.
- Flowers, potted plants or soil should not be permitted in buildings that house collections.
- Isolate newly acquired or infested objects from the rest of the collection.
- Remove products of infestation new collections are integrated into storage or exhibition areas.
- Locate possible sources of infestation (such as beneath floorboards, inside a cushion, or in bird and rodent nests under eaves and between walls).



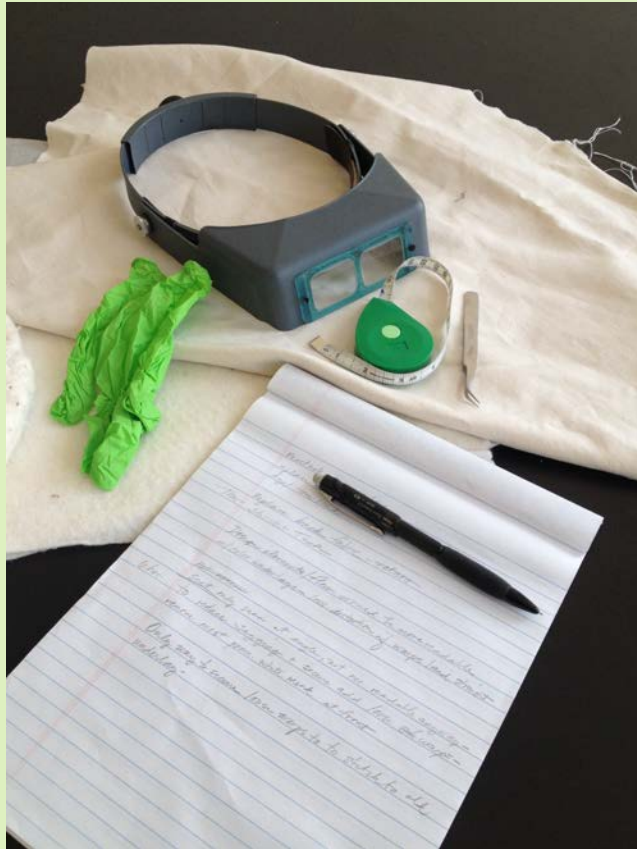
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Assessment of your collection's condition is crucial to determining conservation needs.



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An organized work area will make your examination more efficient.



Proper handling of textiles:

- Don't touch textile surfaces unless absolutely necessary. Wash hands often and/or use protective gloves to isolate skin acids and oils.
- Carry small and/or fragile textiles on a covered flat support, using both hands.
- Enlist help in moving large, heavy textiles. Have a clear space ready.
- Use a cart to transport boxed or dimensional items.
- Remove any items from your body that might catch, snag, or tear textiles.
- Avoid stacking flat or folded items on top of each other.
- Seek professional advice about handling or moving textiles with active deterioration and structural damages.



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Record your findings.

Condition Report Notations

Examined by:

Date:

General Description:

Construction and Condition:

Dimensions:

Materials:

Construction:

Techniques used:

Supports, if any:

Interior condition:

Missing parts or holes:

Tears:

Abraded areas:

Loss of warp or weft:

Surface damage:

Fading:

Soil:

Stains:

Marks or accretions:

Previous repairs, alterations, or compensation:



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Take time to surface clean dusty or soiled objects before returning them to storage or display.



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Each material has its own unique reaction to environmental conditions.



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Some materials have inherent flaws that promote deterioration.



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Degrading Celluloid



Glass crazing and leather rot



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Consider your storage environments.

- Attic, attic closets and crawl-spaces
- Household closets and storage furniture
- Basement
- Out buildings: Barns, garages, storage units



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Most house museum have compromised storage spaces.

Household furniture & spaces

- Closets
- Armoires
- Dresser drawers
- Linen and pantry drawers
- Random shelving
- Crawl spaces

Four basic storage techniques

- Flat
- Folded
- Rolled
- Hanging
- Framed



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To provide complete support, some textiles are best stored flat.



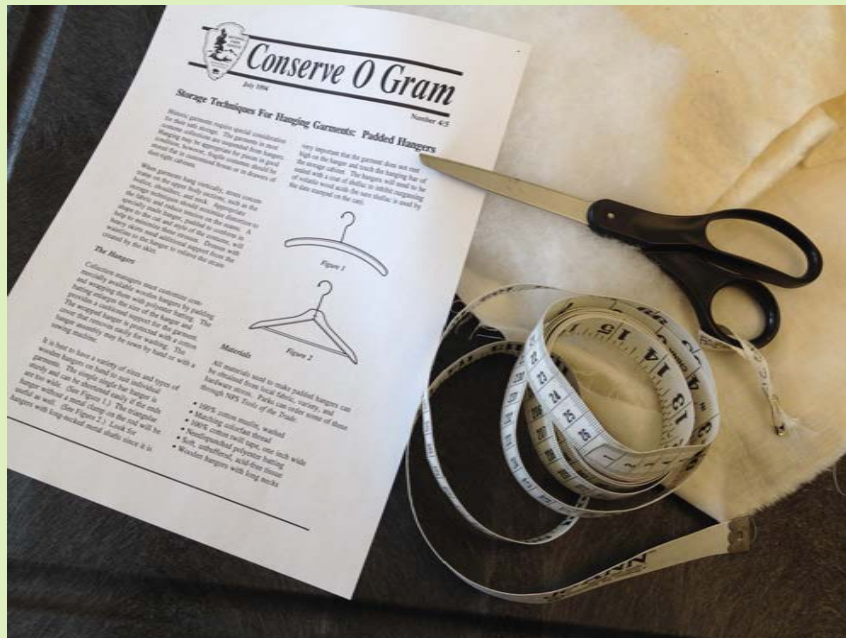
Provide appropriate hanging solutions for clothing.



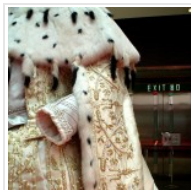
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Enlist volunteer help to customize hangers or order custom-made.



Mounting Garments for Display



In this webinar, Kathleen Kiefer and Petra Slinkard, of the Indianapolis Museum of Art, shared their process for mounting garments for display. Providing both a conservation and curatorial perspective, Kathleen and Petra focused specifically on mounting to mannequins.

Featured Resources:

- PowerPoint Presentation: [Mounting Garments for Display](#)
- Webinar Handout: [Mannequin References and Supplies](#)
- [Mannequin Measurements Diagram](#)
- [The Indianapolis Museum of Art on Conservation Reel](#) (See page two for a video on displaying Mola Textiles on custom forms with Kathleen Kiefer.)
- [IMA TV: Mannequin Preparation with Petra Slinkard](#)
- [Goldsmith Mannequins](#)
- [Rootstein Mannequins](#)
- [LV Mannequins](#)
- [Kyoto Mannequins](#)
- [Dress Forms](#)
- [Fashion Encyclopedia](#)
- [Vintage Fashion Guild](#)
- [Fashion Era](#)
- [FDIM Blog](#)
- [Light Impressions](#)
- [Threaded \(Smithsonian\)](#)
- [Australian Dress Registry](#)
- Relevant blog posts from the Indianapolis Museum of Art: [So, What If It Doesn't Fit?](#), [Building a Bird\(man\) House, From One into Another](#), and [Who's that girl? Part 1: Mannequin preparation](#).

Recorded: Wednesday, March 27, 2013

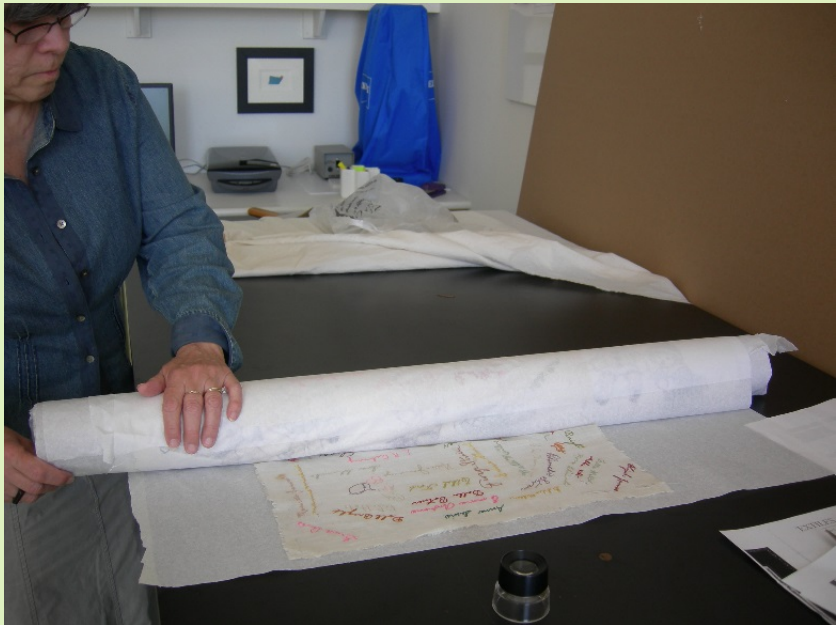
Duration: Approximately 1:20 minutes

Guest Experts: Kathleen Kiefer, Senior Conservator of Textiles, Indianapolis Museum of Art & Petra Slinkard, Curatorial Associate, Textile and Fashion Arts, Indianapolis Museum of Art

Host: Jenny Wiley Arena, Coordinator of Communications and Online Learning, Heritage Preservation

Recording:

Choose a tube of suitable diameter and generous width when rolling a flat textile.



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Unsupported rolling can result in irreversible damages.



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Under-sized storage boxes leave the artifacts vulnerable and at risk of damage.



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Resist over-packing costume boxes.

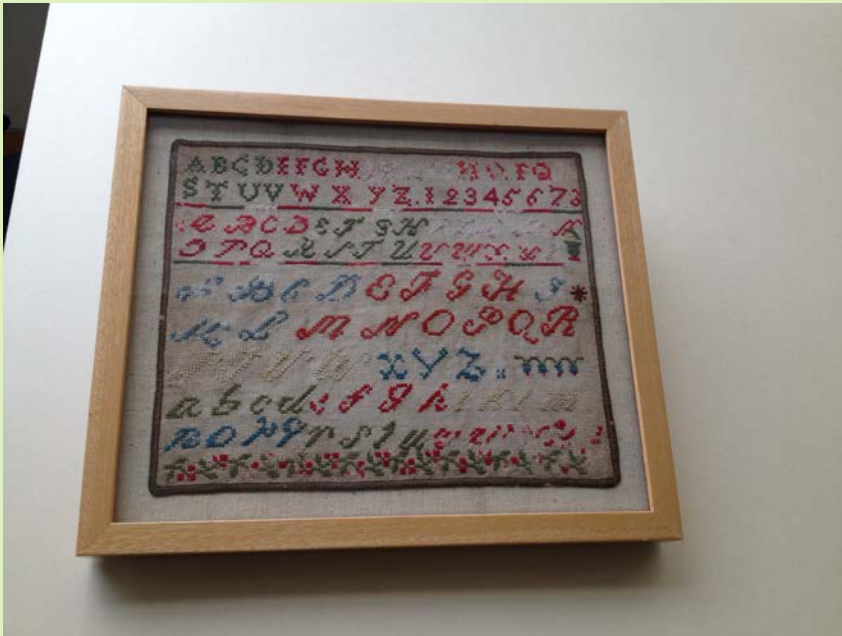


Images: Camille Meyers Breeze



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Conservation framing can provide a microclimate to buffer environment swings and keep pollutants out.



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Document and attempt to preserve historic framing elements.



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Monitor framed collections for changes in object as well as mount materials.



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Work to improve rather than perfect.

- Light, humidity temperature modified
- Clean, well-organized storage
- All levels of staff informed & involved



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A textile's rate of deterioration can be significantly slowed with proper preventive care.



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Knowing the ideal settings for temperature, relative humidity, and visible light, and knowing how to filter UV radiation and pollution is essential for preserving your collection. An Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program is essential to protect your collection from pests.



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Identify objects at risk.



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Address structural problems
immediately.



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Move objects away from heating vents.



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Monitor all storage areas as part of your regular housekeeping schedule.



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Practice effective cleaning procedures.



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Avoid storing objects or boxes directly on floors.



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Identify inadequate storage containers.



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Improve that which you must live with.



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Adapt existing furniture to safely house textiles.



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Protect furnishing from visitors.



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Consult with historic furnishing experts before removing or replacing textile furnishings.



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Draft a disaster response plan ASAP



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Protecting Your Collections: Writing a Disaster Response Plan



The most comprehensive disaster plans cover the four facets of the emergency management cycle—prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery—which correspond to before, during, and after a disaster. If you have been meaning to write a disaster plan but your efforts have stalled, the webinar recordings and course materials found below will help you establish the crucial first steps following a disaster. The Pocket Response Plan, or PReP™, developed by the Council of State Archivists and customizable by all institution types, was featured as a resource that will help you respond when—not if—disaster strikes.

This course followed [Risk Evaluation: First Step in Disaster Planning](#), which provided an overview of the disaster planning process. This course is a part of the [Caring for Yesterday's Treasures—Today](#) series.

In addition to webinar recording links below, you will also see transcripts of those recordings, resources that were compiled by the course instructor, and PowerPoint presentations.

Webinar 1: Response: One Facet of the Emergency Management Cycle

Tuesday, March 5, 2013

2:00 – 3:30 pm EST

Instructor: [Julie Page](#)

What you do—and do not do—following a disaster can spell the difference between success and failure. Do you know who to call? Are you familiar with your facility's emergency systems? What type of supplies do you have on hand to immediately address the situation? Which staff members have been trained to respond and to work together as a team? This overview introduced participants to the Pocket Response Plan.

[Webinar 1 Complete Handouts](#) (pdf, 2 MB)

Includes: PowerPoint presentation, generic PReP™ plan, and sample PReP™ plans

Black and white version of [Webinar 1 Complete Handouts](#)

Webinar 1 Closed Captioning [Transcript](#)

[CLICK HERE FOR THE WEBINAR 1 RECORDING](#)

Webinar 2: PReP™ Side A: Communications

Thursday, March 7, 2013

2:00 – 3:30 pm EST

Instructor: [Julie Page](#)

The top priority following any disaster, large or small, is human safety. Knowing how to contact or notify staff, volunteers, and patrons is key to ensuring a safe evacuation and a safe response. Who else should be on your contact

Some damages require a conservator's help.



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Free web-based resources for further study

- Collecting to Collections Archives
- NPS Museum Management Guide
- NEDCC downloadable pamphlets
- NPS Conserve O Gram series
- Online Conservation library: books.google.com
- Your recommendations and comments, which will be archived here



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Thanks for your time and attention!



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