



ART COLLECTION MANAGEMENT

Disaster preparation for collections

Although it is impossible to prevent natural disasters, thorough preparation can help decrease the likelihood and severity of loss. Here are several steps you can take to help protect your collection if disaster strikes.

1.

Keep a current and complete inventory. A detailed inventory can help facilitate the claims process in the event of significant loss. It can range from a simple list or spreadsheet to a comprehensive collections management database. Be sure to include the following information for each object:

- General description including artist/maker, title, materials, dimensions, date, physical characteristics and any integral parts (e.g., framing, base, stand and original packaging)
- Detailed location description.
- Images for easy identification
- Special handling, storage and/or installation requirements

Update your inventory when items are added or removed from your collection, and keep a copy in an easily accessible location away from your home.

2.

Maintain current insurance valuations. Current valuations help ensure your collection is adequately insured and can expedite the claims process in the unfortunate event of damage or loss. Discuss with your preferred appraiser how frequently these valuations should be updated.

Store appraisal reports and receipts in a safe location, such as a water- and fire-resistant file cabinet, and keep copies off-site. Collections management systems typically are capable of storing scanned copies of these documents.

3.

Hire a professional conservator to periodically inspect your collection. Conservators specialize in identifying, assessing and treating condition issues. They can also recommend how to handle, pack, ship and store your art before, during and after an emergency. Fine art conservators often specialize in different types of objects, such as paintings, three-dimensional art (e.g., sculptures and decorative art) and works on paper.

4.

Identify and engage service providers. In addition to conservators, fine art service providers typically include consultants, art handlers, transit companies, storage facilities and security companies. Some offer comprehensive planning and response programs, while others team up to provide a customized program. They can assist with making important decisions, such as prioritizing activities and establishing criteria for determining when your collection should be evacuated.

These key resources may be limited in your area and in great demand during emergencies. Build relationships early. Having a letter of understanding or service contract in place can help ensure they are available when you need them.

5.

Develop an actionable emergency plan. To be effective, you and those authorized to execute the plan must be familiar with every aspect of the plan as well as their roles and responsibilities. Once your emergency planning is complete:

- Test your emergency response with all parties to identify issues and address difficulties prior to a real-world event. Assess your plan regularly to ensure it is always up-to-date, especially contact information for outside vendors and emergency responders.
- Document all decisions, processes and resources. Keep multiple copies in various locations to ensure it is always accessible.

6.

Determine where your collection will be stored. Identify your emergency storage location well in advance, whether an area in your home, a secondary residence or a storage facility built to withstand severe events. Remember the risk for accidental damage increases when items are in transit and consider:

- If you will be away during hurricane season, move your collection to a storage facility that specializes in the types of objects you collect. Local storage facilities are accustomed to storing objects at this time.
- If you will be in residence during hurricane season, create a safe storage area for more important and/or fragile objects. This space could range from an internal room or closet without external openings, to a customized fire- and water-resistant vault built to house specific objects.

7.

Create a safe and secure home environment. Here are several actions you can take to minimize the risk of collections damage or loss at any time:

- Store artwork at least six inches above the floor, such as on shelving or palettes, to protect it from leaks, flooding and accidental damage.
- Store jewelry in a home safe or bank vault.
- Hang artwork using the most secure hanging techniques and hardware.
- Secure breakables to their surfaces and displays to the wall or floor.

8.

Prioritize objects. Determine well in advance of an event which objects will be moved or evacuated to safe storage and treated first in case of damage. Several factors will affect the priority, such as the market and sentimental value, fragility, and the severity and type of damage.

Work with a conservator experienced in disaster response to identify which objects can be handled post-storm by you and/or your staff, and which ones will require professional assistance. Include handling and triage instructions so that each object can be assessed and stabilized as quickly as possible if damaged. Special considerations may be needed for large and/or heavy objects that require special engineering and equipment to be moved.

9.

Prepare your home and property. Proactively eliminate unnecessary hazards and improve accessibility:

- Ensure your street address is visible so emergency services and responders can easily find your home. Installing a Knox box can help police and fire departments access your home in an emergency.
- Adequately protect large outdoor artwork that must remain in place during an event from high winds, harsh rain, salt spray and flying debris. Allow time for implementing these preparations as needed.
- Move outdoor furniture inside. If it must remain outside, cover and batten it down.

10.

Be ready for the unexpected. Real-life conditions may turn out to be much different than your planning assumes. The more contingencies you anticipate, the better prepared you will be if disaster strikes.



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