

## MUSEUMS AT RISK

### ICOM Museums Emergency Programme: Prevention and Recovery in Emergency Situations

Human and natural disasters are a major threat to cultural heritage. Hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, land slides, volcanoes, wind effects, fires, war and other catastrophes wreck havoc on the environment and sometimes completely destroy entire areas of cultural heritage, both moveable and immovable. The objective No. 8 of the *ICOM Triennial Programme 1998–2001* was 'to defend the heritage in danger'. In August 1999, ICOM sent a questionnaire concerning disasters to its National Committees. Around 40 countries answered and provided useful information and references for the development of a long-term programme (see report from the USA below). This programme could be considered within the framework of the concerns of the International Committee of the Blue Shield, which was established to facilitate international response to threats or emergencies through co-operation at a global level. The programme could also be considered as a response to the needs expressed by museum professionals all over the world. Collaboration with specialised institutions at international and local level will be a priority in order to avoid superposition of actions in the same field. The Blue Shield National Committees network, together with the National and relevant (Conservation: ICOM-CC and Security: ICMS) International Committees of ICOM, UNESCO, ICCROM, GCI, ICOMOS, ICA, IFLA and Red Cross and other humanitarian organisations will become an active part in the implementation of the programme.

The aim of the programme is to advance understanding and awareness of the nature of disaster phenomena and of how to limit and contain damage by using preventive conservation measures and rapid interventions, in order to save cultural heritage and avoid the development of a crisis. The programme will contribute through increased knowledge from case studies and empirical research:

- to show how rescue, salvage and aftermath operations can be co-ordinated to achieve maximum performance under intense pressure;
- to improve research and strengthen the capacities of museum professionals in the field of emergency planning, disaster preparedness and recovery by taking into account all ecological implications, community-involvement aspects and by respecting local traditional techniques and methods;
- to compare strategies, and share knowledge and insights on a world wide scale;
- to enable the creation of a pro-active climate where contingency planning is a central element in the prevention and mitigation of disasters;
- to produce, translate and disseminate tools in the form of examples of specific web sites, handbooks/guidelines on emergency planning, disaster preparedness and recovery for museums, also available on the web, and so on;
- to train museum professionals with theory and field exercises to be able to prevent and react to disasters;
- to publish and disseminate surveys results and the diagnostics of National/Regional resources on disaster preparedness;
- to enable the creation of regional groups of experts specialised in disaster prevention and recovery for museums and able to train other colleagues in their region;
- to equip those groups of experts with basic instruments and reference material for disaster prevention and recovery;

- to launch an awareness and fund raising campaign to make regional groups self sustainable;
- through the evaluation of the whole programme, to identify new actions to disseminate the knowledge acquired.

#### Phases of the Programme

The first phase of the programme will be an International Conference to increase public awareness of movable heritage vulnerability, disaster preparedness and recovery. Its objectives will be:

- to sensitise the participants of the Conference and the public invited to the problems connected to movable heritage disasters;
- to improve their awareness and raise their specific knowledge in this field;
- to create a network of specialists on movable heritage emergencies all over the world that could collaborate in disaster situations, especially in co-ordination with the ICBS (International Committee of the Blue Shield);
- to produce a document with guidelines and recommendations on moveable heritage emergencies, which will give emphasis on legal and government decisional aspects and public involvement.

Participants will be invited from all over the world, and include museum and heritage professionals (conservation and management); senior police members; fire, ambulance and medical emergency planning officers; health and safety professionals (Red Cross, Medecins sans frontières); mechanical and civil engineers, environmental scientists, and representatives of insurance companies.

The second phase of the programme will include at least nine thematic workshops that will be organised all over the world in the following subjects and their related disasters: armed conflict, tropical storms (hurricanes, typhoons), earthquakes, flooding, fire, volcanoes, industrial and energy pollution, inadequate maintenance and training, and vandalism, theft and looting. The workshops will bring together museum professionals coming from regions affected by the same 'disaster' – for example, earthquakes: Japan, Italy, Pacific Islands, Central Asia, California Central and South America. By the end of the workshops, participants will have an advanced understanding of the nature of their specific subject (armed conflict, tropical storms, earthquakes, flooding etc.) and have learnt how to limit and contain damage, and will have produced thematic draft support didactic materials for the other phases of the programme.

The third phase concerns the publication, translation and diffusion of handbooks on disaster preparedness and recovery, which will be also available on the web. These publications will contain guidelines and recommendations on moveable heritage emergencies, with emphasis on legal and government decisional aspects and public involvement. Glossary, bibliographies, a list of organisations acting in the world in this specific field (with complete addresses and web pages), legal instruments already available, a list of instruments and technical support companies and other useful documents will be included. The publications will be produced

at least in English, French and Spanish. If necessary or suitable, translations in other languages will be possible with local funds and support. The publication will be available on the web and at least distributed to all participants in the training activities and to heritage institutions throughout the world.

The fourth phase will focus on the creation of regional and/or thematic (for example, specialised in earthquakes or hurricanes) groups of experts, specialised in disaster prevention and recovery for museums, able to train other colleagues in their region. In the countries where the National Committees of the Blue Shield already exist, they will serve as a reference point.

The fifth phase concerns the launch of the awareness and fund raising campaign in order to make regional groups self sustainable. This type of action could, for example, include the 'Museums at risk day' including differentiated fundraising activities at a local level.

The sixth phase will include the organisation and implementation of Training Workshops on Disaster Preparedness and Recovery at the regional level (with a snowball effect: trained professionals could train others, and so on) for professionals related to museums. This training activity will have a practical approach and exercises. The Training Workshops will contribute to the creation of professional expertise to create emergency plans and design, co-ordinate and rescue activities of museum collections in emergency conditions, as well as preventing disasters in exceptional situations. It is intended to make available, if necessary, the Handbook on Disasters preparedness in the language of the country that hosts the workshop and to publish the diagnostic of national/regional resources in disaster preparedness and make this available to all heritage institutions in the region at least.

In order to give sense and continuity to the programme, and to ensure the sustainability of the programme in the different regions, themes addressed by the project (such as emergency planning, preventive conservation, and so on) should be introduced into relevant university training-curricula. Legislation to support emergency planning should also be improved or introduced. Professionals trained through this programme could then act as trainers and organise additional training activities in their region for other professionals.

Cristina Menegazzi  
Programme Specialist, ICOM  
Maison de l'UNESCO  
1, rue Miollis, 75732 Paris cedex France  
Tel. (33) 1 45682834; Fax (33) 1 43067862  
menegazzi.icom@unesco.org

## The Effect of Natural and Anthropogenic Disasters on Museums and other Cultural Resources

Cultural heritage, like human life, is inevitably and irreversibly affected by natural and anthropogenic disasters. The bombing of the Uffizi Museum in Florence in 1993, the transportation of objects from the National Museum of Kuwait to Baghdad in 1990, and Japan's Kobe earthquake in 1995 all caused the destruction or loss of irreplaceable links to our cultural heritage. The protection of cultural heritage is the primary responsibility of all museum professionals. Therefore, on 1 June 1999, the ICOM Executive Council formed a working group to address the issues noted in Objective 8 of the 1998–2001 Triennial programme. Objective 8 is

designed to defend heritage in danger through the following initiatives:

- increase solidarity between museums and professionals;
- improve response to urgent needs expressed by professionals facing situations of armed conflict or natural disaster;
- support and encourage national participation in, and respect of, relevant international cultural protection Conventions and other international instruments;
- improve general information about the extreme vulnerability of the world's natural heritage;
- fight against the illicit traffic in cultural property;
- collaborate with police, customs officers and other relevant authorities;
- continue ICOM's participation in the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS);
- collaborate with UNESCO and the States party to the Hague Convention of 1954 in the revision of the Convention, and in its subsequent promotion;
- create a structure for interaction between museum professionals and the scientific community for the purpose of generating and disseminating information relating to ecological and cultural degradation.

In accordance with the Objective 8 initiatives, the Executive Council prepared a questionnaire to determine the effects of disasters on member countries' cultural institutions. The questionnaire focuses not only on museums, but also on cultural heritage as a whole. The Executive Council distributed the questionnaire on 13 August 1999 and urged each country to complete it as fully as possible.

## US Responses

The first step for AAM/ICOM, the US National Committee, in completing the questionnaire, was to gather statistics on disasters by consulting government publications such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Storm Data Report, the FBI's Bomb Data Center Report, and the United States Fire Administration's Fire in the United States. The World Wide Web was an invaluable resource; many of the governmental websites have links to vast databases of information.

The statistics on disasters in the United States are startling. Each type of disaster is singly capable of destroying numerous lives and millions of dollars in property each year.

- Tornadoes average about 1100 deaths a year and cause between \$400 and \$750 million in damage annually.
- Floods are the US's number one weather related killer, as well as the weather disaster that causes the most property damage. Floods caused over \$6 billion in damage in 1997 alone.
- In the period between 1990–1999, 18 hurricanes landed on the US mainland. Hurricanes caused over \$49.5 billion in damage between 1990–1999.
- From 1990–1999, the US experienced over 28,000 earthquakes, ranging in magnitude from 0.1–7.9 on the Richter Scale.

The US is affected by more than just natural disasters. The FBI report 'Terrorism in the United States' describes the international and domestic terrorist attacks against the US. The report shows an average of about 3 incidents a year from 1990–1997, with a high of seven attacks in 1990 and a low of zero attacks in 1994.

The FBI Bomb Data Center collects and reports bombing information; its reports reflect the unlawful use of explosive and incendiary devices in the United States. The Bomb Data Center reports an average of 2000 bombings in the United States each year.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) shows an average of 102 fires in museums and 212 fires in libraries each year. The direct property loss from all fires is about \$9.8 billion a year; however, the indirect costs of fires reach over \$100 billion annually. Of the 22 industrial nations that are examined by the World Fire Statistics Centre, the US fire death rate was higher than all but two – Finland and Hungary. One reason for this disparity is that the US emphasises the use of advanced fire suppression technology and fire service delivery mechanisms, while other nations emphasise fire prevention.

## Effects on Cultural Institutions

United States cultural institutions are not unaffected by the numerous disasters that strike the country each year. However, identifying cultural institutions affected by a disaster was a challenge. No formal records are kept on US disaster-affected institutions. Neither the American Association of Museums (AAM) nor any of the regional associations keep records on institutions in their jurisdiction that have been damaged by disasters. The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) assistance records do not define recipients by type and are therefore ineffectual in determining the effect of disasters on the nation's cultural heritage. Many museum professionals knew of institutions within their region that had been damaged or destroyed. Because this information was kept and communicated in an ad hoc manner, a notice was posted on Museum-L and in museum association newsletters asking for information on disaster affected museums. None of these listings elicited significant responses. Therefore, a one-page survey that included the museum's address and contact information, the type of disaster experienced, the resulting damage, what actions were taken to prevent and recover, and what assisting organisations were involved was sent to the 2893 institutional members of AAM.

The results were overwhelming. A total of 796 surveys were returned, a response rate of 28%. The response demonstrates the importance museum professionals place on protecting their institutions from disasters. Thirteen additional institutions, whose disasters were published in newspapers or other media, were also included, bringing the total number of documented institutions to 809. The survey results show the devastating effects disasters have on cultural institutions. Of the institutions examined, 303 (37.5%) had at least one disaster between 1990–2000. Thirteen respondents (1.6%) reported damage by disasters before 1990. Therefore, 493 (60.9%) were not affected by disasters.

## Types of Disasters and Extent of Financial Damage

The following numbers and percentages reflect disasters occurring in examined museums between 1990–2000, as requested in the ICOM questionnaire.

- Some institutions had more than one disaster; the total number of disasters that affected museums was 384.
- The disaster that affected the most responding museums was the hurricane; 49 museums were damaged by these storms.
- Vandalism and flood both damaged 48 museums, and severe thunderstorms damaged 32.
- Seventy-five museums selected the 'Other' option on the survey and specified various types of disasters, including: Helon release, avalanche, building collapse, hail, ice storm, insect infestation, shooting, and volcanic ash fall.

Museums that reported disasters were also asked if they had an emergency preparedness plan in effect at the time of the disaster; 47% responded in the affirmative. Forty-eight percent did not have an emergency preparedness plan and 5% did not respond.

The disasters that affected US museums during the 1990–2000 period caused significant financial damage.

- Fire, although it affected only 11 museums, caused the most damage; it accounted for between \$3.5 million and \$5.7 million in loss.
- Floods caused between \$2.3 million and \$5.0 million in damage.
- Hurricanes cost the cultural community between \$2.0 and \$4.1 million.

The total estimated damage of all disasters that affected museums in the decade, 1990–2000, was between \$13 and \$27 million. This total indicates an average damage amount of \$43,000 to \$88,000 per institution. The broad range of financial damage reported reflects the bracketed valuations used in the survey.

## Responsibility for Protection

Although the issue of the protection of cultural property is one of concern at the national, regional, and state levels, currently, no national organisation is charged with the specific role of the 'safeguard and evacuation of cultural property' as defined in the ICOM questionnaire. The responsibility to protect the US's 1500 botanical gardens and arboreta, 185 zoos and aquaria, 122,000 libraries, 8000 museums, and countless archives is addressed by institutional-specific organisations and informal, localised agreements. For example, the National Park Service maintains two event teams that protect National Park areas. Both teams secure and protect curatorial collections from damage, are composed of federal law-enforcement officers, and are activated 24 hours after an event begins. The teams are focused primarily on NPS sites, but will assist other federal land-management agencies when requested.

Non-federal institutions that require assistance to protect and evacuate their cultural property rely on loosely structured arrangements within their region or state. They may pool and share resources or offer transportation, storage, or support services to other museums in the collaborative network. The absence of a formal organisation or national policy that addresses the safeguard and evacuation of cultural property does not indicate, however, a disregard of the importance of preserving the cultural heritage of the United States. The National Task Force on Emergency Response, formed in 1994, is a group of more than 80 cultural service organisations and federal agencies. Their goal is to ensure that in future disasters, cultural institutions better anticipate problems and quickly find the help necessary to speed recovery. Many national, regional, and state museum and library organisations, as well as regional conservation alliances, work to develop and provide disaster training for cultural institutions. Topics in training sessions include the development of practical emergency preparedness plans, evacuation procedures, and disaster recovery steps. In this manner, cultural heritage institutions become their own resource for the safeguard and evacuation of cultural property.

Amy Polley  
Special Project Coordinator  
Museum of Texas Tech University  
AAM-ICOM Member  
apolley@swsportsgroup.com