Damage and loss

Definition

Responding to damage to, or the loss of, objects in your care.

Scope

This procedure might be needed in response to anything from minor, accidental damage to one object during handling to a fire that destroys large parts of your collection. Hopefully, the measures you put in place during the procedure *Emergency planning for collections* will reduce both the likelihood and impact of significant damage or loss. Your emergency plan will also tell you how to respond during an emergency. The focus of *Damage and loss* is what happens next, documenting the incident and recording decisions made and actions taken.

If there has been an obvious break-in and prize exhibits are missing, theft is a reasonable conclusion and you respond accordingly. However, if an object is not where it is supposed to be in the stores, things may be less clear. Has it been stolen, or has a colleague moved it and been sloppy with their record-keeping? It may take a lot of time and effort to work out which it is. This is why it is so important to be scrupulous with *Location and movement control*, and *Audit* regularly to check that your *Inventory* information is always up-to-date.

The Spectrum standard

You should have a **policy** on how you deal with damaged and lost objects. This could either be a standalone document or part of a wider collections management policy. Either way, in deciding your policy you will most likely need to consider these questions:

- Who within the museum should be informed if objects are damaged or suspected lost?

- Who is responsible for taking action?

- What internal checks should be made to locate objects that are missing from their recorded location?

- Who decides at what point external bodies such as the police or insurers should be informed of suspected theft?

- Who is responsible for dealing with any media interest there may be in an incident?
- How will incidents be investigated and reviewed for lessons learned?

You should also have a written **procedure** that explains the steps to follow when objects are lost or damaged. Spectrum's suggested procedure is a useful starting point, but however you do it, your own procedure should meet the following minimum requirements:

Minimum requirement	Why this is important
You inform the owners of lost or damaged objects that do not belong to you.	You are completely open with lenders and maintain trust even when things go wrong.
You record the circumstances of all incidents involving damage to, or loss of, objects as fully as possible.	You will need detailed documentation for any internal review, insurance claim or police investigation.
Condition reports (including images) are made for damaged objects.	This is the first step of planning appropriate conservation.
You can give police enough information about stolen objects (including images where possible) to identify them if they are later recovered.	Criminals are likely to remove the object numbers from stolen items.
All decisions and actions in your response to damage or loss are fully documented.	You can explain how incidents involving damage or loss have been handled in any later investigation or dispute.
Lessons learned from incidents are used to improve relevant policies and procedures.	You will not repeat avoidable mistakes.

Suggested procedure

Responding to damage

Follow the steps set out in your emergency plan.

Depending on the scale of the damage, follow appropriate steps outlined in the plan for immediate action.

Move the objects.

If practical move the damaged objects. Go to *Location and movement control*.

Assess the objects' condition, and also care and conservation needs.

Provide conservators with relevant object records and previous technical assessment and conservation reports. Go to **Condition checking and technical assessment**.

Are the objects on loan?

If objects are on loan to you inform the owner immediately. File a copy of the correspondence and note the *Document location* so you and others can find it in future.

Record information about the damage event.

Record the following for each damaged object or group of objects:

Object identification information

- The *Object number* of objects owned by you.

Object entry information

- The *Entry number* of loans and any other objects that do not belong to you (eg enquiries).

Damage/loss information

- A reference number for the damage event - *Damage/loss reference number*.
- Dates of discovery and reporting of the damage - *Damage/loss date* (use a standard format).
- Name and contact details of those involved in the discovery and reporting of the damage:
    - *Damage/loss reporter* (use a standard form of name).
    - *Address*.
- How the damage took place - *Damage/loss method* (use a standard term source).
- Other details of the damage - *Damage/loss note*, including:
    - The circumstances of the damage.
    - Details of the damage and references to any condition reports.

Inform senior staff, your governing body, and the press (if appropriate) in line with your policy.

File a copy of these notifications and note the *Document location* so you and others can find them in future.

Follow-up action when objects are damaged.

If relevant, inform your insurance company or indemnity provider.

Go to **Insurance and indemnity**.

Are the objects to be conserved?

If conservation work is needed go to *Collections care and conservation*.

Might disposal be considered?

If the damage is so bad that you might need to dispose of damaged objects go to *Deaccessioning and disposal*.

Responding to loss of objects

Implement your security procedure or emergency plan.

If appropriate (eg if a theft seems to have just taken place) put your immediate response procedure in place. Depending on the circumstances, you may need to alert the following quickly, even before the scale and nature of the problem is fully established:

- Person responsible for the objects.
- Internal security staff or volunteers.
- Police (where appropriate).
- External agencies or specialists.

Although the initial report may be verbal, a written report should be made as soon as is possible. Note all telephone conversations and file a copy of correspondence, recording the *Document location* so you and others can find them in future.

Confirm exactly what is missing.

Confirm the exact number and nature of the missing objects and retrieve all relevant documentation relating to them.

Go to *Audit*.

Are the objects on loan?

If objects are on loan to you inform the owner immediately. File a copy of the correspondence and note the *Document location* so you and others can find it in future.

Was the loss by theft?

If theft is known or suspected, provide the police with photographs and other descriptive material required to identify missing objects. You may also need to inform:

- Your regional museum development organisation.
- National Security Adviser at Arts Council England.
- Online databases of stolen cultural property.

Record information about the loss.

Record the following for each object or group of objects following a loss:

Object identification information

- The *Object number* of objects owned by you.

Object entry information

- The *Entry number* of loans and any other objects that do not belong to you (eg enquiries).

Damage/loss information

- A reference number for the loss event - *Damage/loss reference number*.
- Dates of discovery and reporting of the loss - *Damage/loss date* (use a standard format).
- Name and contact details of those involved in the discovery and reporting of the loss:
    - *Damage/loss reporter* (use a standard form of name).
    - *Address*.
- How the loss took place - *Damage/loss method* (use a standard term source).
- Other details about the loss - *Damage/loss note*.

Follow-up action when objects are lost

Inform senior staff, your governing body, and the press (if appropriate) in line with your policy.

File a copy of these notifications and note the *Document location* so you and others can find them in future.

If relevant inform your insurance company or indemnity provider.

If the missing objects are covered by insurance or indemnity go to *Insurance and indemnity*.

Damage and loss: damage

Responding to damage

Damage event	Reponding to →	Follow the steps set out in your emergency plan.
Emergency plan	Based on →	

? Can the damaged objects be moved? — No

Yes ↓

Location and movement control ← Go to and return from → Move the objects.

Condition checking and technical assessment ← Go to and return from → Assess the objects' condition, and also care and conservation needs.

? Are the objects on loan? — No

Yes ↓

Inform the lender. — Send and file → Notice of damage

Record information about the damage event. — Record → *Damage/loss information*

Object identification information

Object entry information

Inform senior staff, your governing body, and the press (if appropriate) in line with your policy. — Send and file → Notice of damage

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Follow-up action

Insurance and indemnity ← Go to — If relevant, inform your insurance company or indemnity provider.

Collections care and conservation ← Go to — **Yes** Are the objects to be conserved? **?**

No

Deaccessioning and disposal ← Go to — **Yes** Might disposal be considered? **?**

No

No further action at this time.

Damage and loss: loss

Responding to loss of objects

| Loss event | Reponding to |
| Emergency plan | Based on |

Implement your security procedure or emergency plan.

Inform all necessary people according to your policy, with a written report as soon as possible. → Send and file → **Report on loss**

Keep copies of correspondence and records of telephone calls about the incident. → Keep and file → **Copies of correspondence and records of telephone calls**

Audit — Go to and return from — Confirm the exact number and nature of the missing objects, and retrieve all relevant documentation relating to them.

? Are the objects on loan? — No

Yes ↓

Inform the lender and reference the notice. → Send and file → **Notice of loss**

? Was the loss by theft? — No

Yes ↓

Give the police descriptions and, if possible, photographs to help identify missing objects. → Send and file → **Photographs and descriptive material (eg ObjectID)**

Inform as needed: National Security Adviser, regional support organisations, online databases of stolen cultural property. → Send and file → **Notice of loss**

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Responding to loss of objects

Record information about the loss.

Record →

Damage/loss information

Object identification information

Object entry information

Follow-up action

Inform governing body, and press (if appropriate) In line with your policy.

Send and file →

Notice of loss

Go to ←

Insurance and indemnity

If relevant inform your insurance or indemnity provider.