



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Grimwade Centre for
Cultural Materials
Conservation



ENVIRONMENT

The conditions of the environment in which objects are displayed and stored are important for preservation. Changes in temperature, humidity, light and contaminants can create conditions which accelerate deterioration. If managed properly, the risk of irreversible damage is reduced.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The key to good collection practice is to understand the collection environment, keep it clean and stable, avoiding rapid fluctuations.

UNDERSTANDING THE COLLECTION

The first step in managing the collection environment is to assess the type of objects, how they are currently stored or displayed, and if some items have been affected and need to be isolated due to fragility or damage.

Poor collection environments can cause mould growth or pest infestation. Affected items must be isolated from others and referred to a conservator.

Assess your collection for visible damage such as shrinking of plastics, drying or cracking of timbers and paintings, fading of photographs and documents. Even the accumulation of dust can cause staining and attract pests.

RESOURCES



A Practical Guide for Sustainable Climate Control and Lighting in Museums and Galleries, Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA), available online:
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/k4wi>



Preventive Conservation, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, available online:
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/34wi>



reCollections
Caring for Collections Across Australia – Handling, Transportation, Storage and Display, Heritage Collections Council, available online:
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/36wi>



Basic requirements of preventive conservation, Canadian Conservation Institute Notes, available online:
<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/q4wi>

UNDERSTANDING THE ENVIRONMENT

The next step is to assess your environment. Environmental conditions should be managed to reduce damage to the collection, but also create a comfortable setting for staff and visitors.

Regular inspection of the environment and reporting assists with identifying and isolating potential environmental problems throughout the year, such as seasonal changes to building environments, dust or water incursions from building works or biological activity.

Conservators use data loggers and lux meters to measure the conditions within museum environments. They regularly measure temperature, humidity and light and keep records so they can track fluctuations and work with building managers to find solutions.

See the following Fact Sheets for more information:

- Light
- Temperature and relative humidity
- Mould
- Dust and pollutants or contaminants
- Pests

SUMMARY

Maintaining a clean and stable environment will reduce rapid deterioration of materials.