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## The Council of State Archivists: Next Executive Director

The Council of States Archivists (CoSA) has selected former Kentucky State Archivist and current CoSA consultant Barbara Teague to be its next Executive Director. Barbara brings a wealth of experience to CoSA, including a 32-year career at the Kentucky State Archives, serving as CoSA Board Vice President and President, and serving as a member of CoSA's State Electronic Records Initiative (SERI) Steering Committee and CoSA's Advocacy Committee. She is also a Distinguished Fellow of the Society of American Archivists (SAA).

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# Health and Safety

## Collections Recovered from Disaster Sites: Health and Safety Tips for Conservators

Recently, the Health and Safety Committee received a query concerning safe handling of collection materials recovered from the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center disaster site. A museum received a filing cabinet drawer containing paper-based materials that had been blown from an office building. The drawer had been stored in an airplane hangar, resulting in mold growth. Handling moldy materials was not a new challenge, but materials exposed to a disaster site like the WTC raised new questions. What contaminants can one expect to find on such collection objects? What precautions should the conservator take to protect from possible health and safety risks prior to its arrival?

The H&S Committee thought that this would be an excellent opportunity to discuss health and safety precautions that should be taken when handling collection objects from events like these. Objects from disaster situations like the World Trade Center attack could have been subjected to many possible hazards. According to multiple sampling reports, over 400 contaminants were identified in air, dust, and debris on objects recovered from the World Trade Center disaster site.

One important feature of these items is that they would have been exposed to heat levels high enough to melt steel, with flames still burning months after the incident. While high heat may reduce some residues and chemicals, it also creates new dangers that the conservator might not be accustomed to encountering during treatment. Below is a list of these likely health and safety threats one should consider before reviewing any object exposed to these conditions:

- Particulates: building and construction materials such as asbestos, fiberglass, silica, plaster, paints, and concrete; explosive residue such as undetonated submicroscopic particles that remain after an explosion; soot and ash, which also can contain materials like polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)
- Chemicals: explosive residue such as inorganic salts and ignition fuels; building and construction materials such as heavy metals and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)
- Biological: biohazard materials such as human remains; organisms that form and thrive due to uncontrolled storage conditions such as mold and bacteria/viruses

The first essential step should be testing and decontamination of the object in question. If your institution does not have an environmental health and safety department, contact a health and safety professional and/or industrial hygienist from another museum to get recommendations for outsourcing this work. If the donor claims that the object has been cleaned and decontaminated, ask for documentation indicating the cleaning contractor, clearance papers from the hazardous materials abatement company and environmental monitoring consultants, and the testing and cleaning protocols for the object. While it might seem tempting to skip this step, you should remember that in order to protect yourself and your team properly, it is necessary to know the types of contaminants that are – or were – on the object.

Once the object has had its hazards identified and removed, it is still best to apply the “precautionary principle”: assume that any or all materials previously mentioned might be present on the object being

treated. Even in miniscule amounts, these materials can be detrimental to one's health. With this in mind, here is the recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) to keep the conservator safe during treatment of objects exposed to catastrophic attacks, assuming that the object already has been tested and decontaminated.

- Eye protection: Non-vented goggles are recommended due to potential offgassing of some of these chemicals and exposure to small particulates.
- Hand protection: Gloves made of North Silver Shield, a laminate of plastic films that provides protection from a variety of chemicals, are recommended. If the collection item has been in contact with PCBs (organohalogens), wear gloves made of neoprene, nitrile, butyl rubber, or Viton (a synthetic rubber and fluoropolymer elastomer) as an additional glove underneath the Silver Shield gloves. Keep in mind that all chemicals eventually permeate any protective barrier, and be sure to change gloves periodically, especially if the gloves' appearance changes. For additional information about gloves, please see the [AIC H&S PPE Chemical Protective Material Selection Guide](#).
- Respiratory protection: a properly fit tested, half-facepiece, air-purifying respirator with P100-series, high-efficiency, particulate and organic vapor cartridge filters should be worn. Disposable "dust-mask" style respirators are not recommended, as they do not protect sufficiently against asbestos or chemicals. If possible, working with the object in a fume hood is recommended for additional personal protection, and to protect those working in adjacent areas. For additional information about respiratory protection, please see the AIC H&S [A Conservator's Guide to Respiratory Protection](#).
- Protective clothing: If asbestos or PCBs are found in testing, disposable outer protective garments are recommended due to the difficulty of ensuring that protective clothing can be properly decontaminated. Outer clothing (e.g. coveralls, lab coats, sleeve guards, shoe covers) should be made of non-woven, chemical-resistant material such as Saranax-coated Tyvek or Viton-coated neoprene.

All disposables should be handled as hazardous waste; place in approved, impervious containers and dispose of according to EPA disposal procedures or as determined by your environmental health and safety department at your institution. Recommended storage for the item is a space that is cold and dry (if the object can tolerate these conditions). These storage conditions will slow down chemical reactions and hinder offgassing of any chemical residues that are found on the collection item and will reduce the risk for mold and bacteria/viral growth.

—Tara Kennedy, AIC Health and Safety Committee



### Need help?

Have a question about health and safety in your conservation work? Send it to us at [health-safety@conservation-us.org](mailto:health-safety@conservation-us.org).

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## People

**Emily K. Bell** has been awarded a Diploma in Conservation by the American Academy of Bookbinding (AAB). Her paper, about using structural elements of books to situate them in time and place, was well received by the AAB jury, and with their encouragement she is currently seeking the right venue and format in which to share it more widely. Emily's first experiences in the field were as a volunteer Conservation Intern at The Textile Museum in Washington, D.C. She was a Conservation Technician at the University of Maryland Libraries from 2001 to 2006, and has been the Collections Conservator at Wellesley College since 2006. She can be reached at [ebell@wellesley.edu](mailto:ebell@wellesley.edu) or [ekb.booksaver@gmail.com](mailto:ekb.booksaver@gmail.com).

**Jen Hunt Johnson** has joined the Preservation Department of the University of Notre Dame, Hesburgh Libraries, as Special Collections Conservator. She formerly worked as the Conservator and Preservation Specialist at Illinois State University, Milner Library. She is a graduate of the Buffalo State College Art Conservation Program (2015). Jen may be reached at [jhuntjoh@nd.edu](mailto:jhuntjoh@nd.edu).

**Jacinta Johnson** is now Assistant Paper Conservator at the Balboa Art Conservation Center in San Diego. She was formerly a Mellon Fellow in Paper Conservation at the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts in Philadelphia. She can be reached at [jjohnson@bacc.org](mailto:jjohnson@bacc.org).

**John McElhone** has retired from the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa) after a long and satisfying career there. He was hired as the Gallery's first photograph conservator in 1986 in order to prepare a large group of daguerreotypes for the inaugural photographs exhibition in the Gallery's newly constructed home. The building opened in 1988 and John went on to spend 25 years treating, storing, examining, researching, explaining, and generally protecting Canada's superb national collection of photographs. In 2011 he was named Chief Conservator of the Restoration and Conservation Laboratory and, more recently, has been Chief, Conservation and Technical Research for the newly formed Canadian Photography Institute. John will remain in Ottawa and will continue to consult; he is planning to assemble his research material on early paper printing into a manuscript for a possible publication. He can be reached at [jpmcelhone@gmail.com](mailto:jpmcelhone@gmail.com).

**Margaret Ordonez** has moved to Camden, TN, and is setting up a textile conservation laboratory, after teaching for 29 years in the textile conservation graduate program at the University of Rhode Island and driving 90 miles a day. She can still be reached at [mordonez@uri.edu](mailto:mordonez@uri.edu).

**Maggie Wessling** joined the conservation team at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture as their Conservator of Photographs in October 2017. Maggie previously worked for three years as the Claire W. and Richard P. Morse Fellow for Advanced Training in the Conservation of Works of Art on Paper at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Maggie completed an M.A. in Art History and an Advanced Certificate in the Conservation of Works of Art at the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU in 2014.



### Making Changes?

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