

## WHEN TO CALL A CONSERVATOR

Robyn Haynie | Utah Museum of Fine Arts  
August 26, 2019 | Salt Lake City, UT

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## WELCOME & OVERVIEW

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### Agenda Overview

SCHEDULE	GOALS FOR TODAY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Welcome &amp; Overview</li> <li>▪ Introduction to Conservation</li> <li>▪ The Dirt</li> <li>▪ Cleaning: Dry Methods</li> <li>▪ Cleaning: Wet Methods</li> <li>▪ Hands-On Activities               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Rolling Cotton Swabs</li> <li>❑ Natural Rubber Sponge</li> <li>❑ Vacuuming Textiles</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Wrap-Up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Difference between Preventive vs. Remedial Conservation</li> <li>▪ Overview of wet and dry cleaning methods</li> <li>▪ Practice with dry cleaning</li> <li>▪ Importance of observation and documentation</li> <li>▪ Understand limits of what you should and should not attempt on your own</li> </ul>




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## Module Instructor



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## INTRODUCTION TO CONSERVATION

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## What is Conservation?

**MITIGATION OF CHANGE OVER TIME**

All things deteriorate in time.

Virgil

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## Preventive Conservation



- Addresses “Agents of Deterioration”
- Focuses on object’s environment to prevent deterioration
- Preventive conservation includes:
  - ✓ Monitoring and controlling environment (relative humidity, temperature, light)
  - ✓ Using appropriate storage and display materials
  - ✓ Creating and following an integrated pest management plan
  - ✓ Creating and following a housekeeping schedule
  - ✓ Objects handled only by trained personnel

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## Remedial Conservation



- Addresses a critical need
  - ✓ Structural stabilization
  - ✓ Stop active deterioration
- Is irreversible
  - ✓ Although hopefully re-treatable
  - ✓ May alter object’s aesthetics
- Is NOT restoration
  - ✓ Goal is to stabilize object
  - ✓ Not to make it look better

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## Conservation Decision-Making

- 1) Why is **action** needed?
- 2) Can the **use or environment be adapted** instead of intervening on the object(s)?
- 3) Do I need to **consult** stakeholders, peers, other specialists?
- 4) What are my **options for action** which will produce an appropriate result with minimum intervention?
- 5) What **effect will my action(s) have** on the evidence of the factors contributing to the identity and significance of the object(s)?

**HANDOUT | Conservation Decision-Making and List of Conservators & Other Professionals available for Utah-based projects**

Adapted from Victoria & Albert Museum Conservation Department Ethics Checklist 2nd Edition, December 2004

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## Conservation Decision-Making (cont'd)

- 6) Do I have **sufficient information and skill** to assess and implement action(s)?
- 7) Is my intended action(s) the best use of **resources** and is it **sustainable**?
- 8) How will my action(s) **affect subsequent** action(s)?
- 9) Have I taken into account the **future use and location** of the object(s) and have I made decisions accordingly?
- 10) Will my action(s) be **fully documented** to a known and accepted standard?
- 11) Will the information resulting from my action(s) be **accessible**?

Adapted from Victoria & Albert Museum Conservation Department Ethics Checklist 2nd Edition, December 2004

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## Cleaning Collections Objects

- Cleaning is an important element of collections management
- Cleaning is an **IRREVERSIBLE** conservation treatment
- Over-cleaning an object can cause irreparable harm and decrease an object's value




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## THE DIRT

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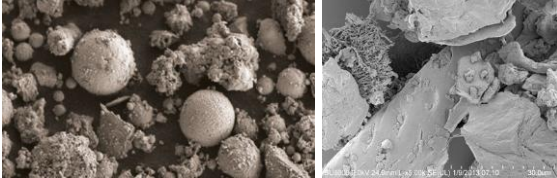
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### A Bit About Dirt

- Dirt is made up of tiny particles of hair, skin, pollen, sand, minerals, etc.
- Dirt particles can be SHARP
- Dirt can be hygroscopic (absorb water), which can make it difficult to remove from an object's surface




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### Where Did The Dirt Come From?

#### IS THE 'DIRT' SIGNIFICANT?



Dust build-up on framed works in storage at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts



Pillow from Abraham Lincoln's deathbed  
(photo courtesy of the Library of Congress)

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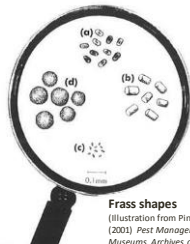
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### What Can We Learn From Dirt?

- Vulnerable objects
- Effectiveness of gallery maintenance / HVAC systems
- Pests
- Object history



Frass shapes  
(Illustration from Pinniger, D. (2001). *Pest Management in Museums, Archives and Historic Houses*. London: Archetype.)



Food residue inside ancient Egyptian bowl  
(Photo courtesy of Alison Whyte, Oriental Institute, University of Chicago)

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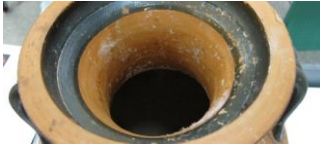
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## How Often Should We Clean Objects?

- Depends on your collection, storage, and environmental conditions
- Check your collection regularly
- Don't forget about objects in storage
- Keeping your spaces clean will help reduce the amount of cleaning necessary for your collection




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## When Shouldn't You Work on an Object?

- If the object doesn't need it
- If an object is visibly unstable or fragile (e.g., flaking, disintegrating, powdering, cracking, etc.)
- If you are unsure of the source of the soil/residue you are trying to remove
- If the object is moldy
- If you are unsure about what the object was made from or how it was made
- If you are not comfortable with the techniques you are using




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## Wait! I Want to Do More Than Clean!

- Remedial conservation is **complex** – there is no recipe book for treatments and much of the work depends on the specific context of the object and institution.
- It is best to **consult with a conservator** about remedial conservation projects. They can provide an idea of the scope of the work needed and what might be undertaken in-house.
- Be prepared to provide them with **detailed photographs** and **condition information** for your object (documentation).
- Conservation projects are **GREAT FOR GRANTS!** Think about how involving a conservator could achieve a complex project and possibly build skills among your staff and volunteers.




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## CLEANING: DRY METHODS

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### Before You Clean...

- Examine
- Document
- Assess
- Prepare




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### Testing

- Testing is a **critical part** of all conservation work
- **Practice** the method and materials you will use on **non-collections objects** until you are comfortable with the techniques
- Do a **small test** on your object prior to undertaking the whole treatment




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## Cleaning Methods: Dry/Surface Cleaning

- Do not involve chemicals or solvents of any kind – INCLUDING WATER!
- Will typically address minor dust build-up




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## More About Dry Cleaning Methods




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## How Do I Know When to Stop?

- When you do not see any more dirt or dust on your swab or sponge or brush.
- Through observation – pay attention to the object's surface. Regularly take breaks and assess your progress.
- If you notice unexpected changes in the object's surface.
- Listen to your instincts – be cautious and stop if you are unsure.




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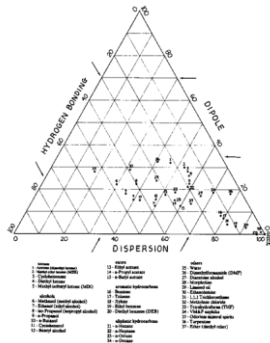
## CLEANING: WET METHODS

### Cleaning Methods: Wet

- Involve chemicals or solvents (including water!)
- Should not be undertaken unless advised by a conservator
- Remember, **like dissolves like** (if you don't understand the chemistry of your object, you could be in trouble...)



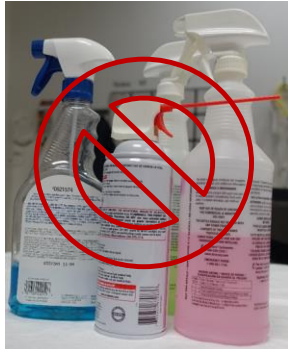
### Think Back to Chemistry Class...



"Solvents and Solubility" Chris Staroudis and Sharon Blank

### Products to Avoid

- Silver polishes
- Windex
- Commercial detergents and leather dressings
- Compressed air
- Bread




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### How Do We Know When to Stop?

- Careful observation
- Don't force it!




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### Clean Your Cleaning Supplies!

- Don't forget
- Make it a part of your maintenance procedures




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## You're Not Done Yet!

- Make sure the condition information you recorded before you cleaned the object is attached to your object file.
- Add information about the cleaning you undertook.
- Keep a log of your collections maintenance activities – note how frequently your spaces get cleaned, the methods and supplies used, and any observations during the cleaning.




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## What's in Your Cleaning Kit?



- Vulcanized rubber sponge (aka 'Smoke sponge')
- Microfiber cleaning cloth
- Bamboo skewers & cotton wool
- Baby nasal aspirator
- Brushes
- Mesh
- Orvus paste

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## HANDS-ON ACTIVITY

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## HANDS-ON ACTIVITY #1

### BASIC DRY CLEANING TECHNIQUES = 60 mins



- 1) Instructor demonstrates techniques (20 minutes):
  - a) Rolling Cotton Swabs
  - b) Cleaning with Smoke Sponge
  - c) Vacuuming
- 2) At your table, choose an object to clean (on your own or in pairs).
- 3) Practice techniques using handout provided (40 mins):
  - b) Smoke Sponge (20 mins)
  - c) Vacuuming (20 mins)

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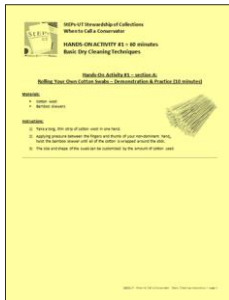
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## HANDS-ON ACTIVITY #1 – section A

### ROLLING COTTON SWABS



- 1) Use cotton wool and bamboo skewers:
  - ✓ Take a long, thin strip of cotton wool in one hand.
  - ✓ Applying pressure between the fingers and thumb of your non-dominant hand, twist the bamboo skewer until all of the cotton is wrapped around the stick.
  - ✓ The size and shape of the swab can be customized by the amount of cotton used.
- 2) Hands-on practice

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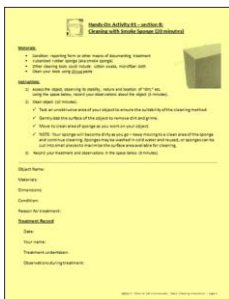
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## HANDS-ON ACTIVITY #1 – section B

### CLEANING WITH SMOKE SPONGE



- 1) Using instruction sheet, record your observations about the object (5 mins)
- 2) Clean object (10 mins)
  - ✓ After assessing your object, test a small area
  - ✓ Dab soiled surface gently to remove dirt and debris
  - ✓ Move to clean area of sponge as you work on your object
- 3) Record your treatment and observations (5 mins)

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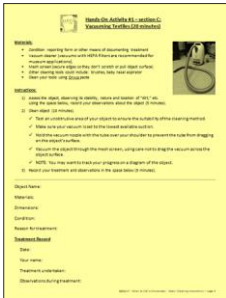
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## HANDS-ON ACTIVITY #1 – section C

### *DRY VACUUMING*



- 1) Using instruction sheet, record your observations about the objects (5 mins)
- 2) Clean objects (10 mins)
  - ✓ After assessing your object, test a small area
  - ✓ Set vacuum to lowest setting and ensure nozzle does not drag across object surface
  - ✓ Vacuum through mesh screen
- 3) Record your treatment and observations (5 mins)

[illegible]

## WRAP UP

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## Quick Recap



## What We Have Covered Today:

- Preventive vs. Remedial Conservation
- Overview of wet and dry cleaning methods
- Dry cleaning techniques for object maintenance

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## Key Takeaways

- Preventive conservation is a cost-effective and minimally impactful way to prevent object deterioration
- Routine maintenance of collections spaces and collections objects is a critical part of collections management
- Any treatment of an object – including cleaning – should only be done after careful observation and documentation




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**What principles and/or strategies have you gained from our work today that you can apply to your museum?**




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## Recommended Resources for Today

American Institute for Conservation (AIC) [www.culturalheritage.org](http://www.culturalheritage.org)  
 AIC's Connecting to Collections Care Online Community <https://www.connectingtocollections.org/>  
 Association for Registrars and Collections Specialists (ARCS) <http://www.arcsinfo.org/>  
 Buck, Rebecca & Jean Gilmore, eds. *Museum Registration Methods*, 5th Edition, AAM Press, 2014.  
 Canadian Conservation Institute Notes [https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/consveogram/cons\\_toc.html](https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/consveogram/cons_toc.html)  
 Catlin-Legutko, Cinnamon & Klingler, Stacy, eds., *Small Museum Toolkit*, Altamira Press, 2012.  
 Lorenzen, A.N., *Museum Preventive Conservation 101: Know Your Enemies - The Agents of Deterioration*  
<http://www.altonerlmuseum.org/blog/museum-preventative-conservation-101-know-your-enemies-the-agents-of-deterioration>  
 National Park Service, *Conserve-o-grams*  
[https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/consveogram/cons\\_toc.html](https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/consveogram/cons_toc.html)  
 National Park Service, *Museum Handbook Part 1, Museum Collections*, 1999.  
<https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/handbook.html>  
 Preparation, Art Handling, Collections Care Information Network (PACCIN) [www.paccin.org](http://www.paccin.org)  
 Rose, Carolyn, et al., eds. *Storage of Natural History Collections: A Preventive Conservation Approach*, 1995.  
 Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC) [www.spnhc.org](http://www.spnhc.org)  
 Southeastern Registrars Association, *Basic Condition Reporting: A Handbook*, 2015.  
 The National Trust, *Manual of Housekeeping*, 2011.

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## Wrap Up! Thanks for Coming!

- This workshop is part of the Utah Division of Arts & Museums' Office of Museum Services **Skills Lab** training series. Subscribe to our newsletter to learn about new topics in coming months!
- This workshop is part of **STEPS-UT**, a partnership between the Utah Division of Arts & Museums, Utah Division of State History, and Utah Humanities, with funding from the Utah Department of Heritage & Arts, the State of Utah, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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