

# **Museums & Galleries NSW**

## **House Keeping in your museum or gallery**

Housekeeping is one of those chores around the museum or gallery which often gets put off while we deal with all the more urgent and/or interesting tasks that are necessary in the running of a cultural venue. Apart from the obvious benefit of having clean exhibitions, carrying out routine housekeeping provides you with the opportunity to check the condition of your collection and keep on top of any problems you may be having with dust, pests, humidity, slow leaks and general wear and tear of both collection material labels and furniture.

To clean the entire collection in one hit is very daunting and would require a large commitment from a substantial number of people. Instead, look at taking a “divide and conquer” approach.

- Divide your exhibition areas up into sections which can easily be cleaned in a couple of hours (this may be one or two exhibition cases, a room or a shelving unit, depending on the arrangement of your space).
- Look at how many sections you now have and how many volunteers are available on a monthly or bimonthly basis.
- Set up a timetable matching volunteers with sections so that each section gets cleaned at least once every six months.
- Generally cleaning would be carried out on a section for two hours, preferably before the museum opens for the day, or on a day the museum is not open.
- You may want to set up a small box to house some cleaning materials such as a dusting cloth (do not use a feather duster as the feathers can scratch surfaces, throw dust around the collection or catch on lifting areas of timber), micro tools for the vacuum cleaner, soft bristled brushes, Windex and cloth to clean display cases and paper and pens to note any problems.
- As you clean, look on and under collection and display material for signs of insect attack such as frass, grazed areas of paper items or labels, loss of fabric etc. Also look for signs of light damage (such as yellowing, fading colour change where things have been sitting on top of other items) or other types of deterioration to the collection. If any damage or changes can be seen, note them down and alert the appropriate person within the organisation (such as the curator, president, exhibition person, museum officer...). If you find evidence of insect attack, do not remove this as it will be useful in determining what sort of insect is attacking the collection and how bad the attack is.

© Museums & Galleries NSW 2008