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# Conserve O Gram

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## Preparing Salvage Caches For Emergency Use

All National Park Service units are required to prepare an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) designed, first, to safeguard human life and, secondly, to maximize the protection of the park's resources, to the extent that this can be done safely. The NPS *Museum Handbook*, Part I (Rev 9/90), Chapter 10, contains guidelines for developing an EOP that considers the protection of museum collections. A park's plan necessarily will be tailored to that park's specific needs, its particular threats, and its collection's vulnerabilities. As plans are developed, however, some elements, such as the salvage cache described in this *Conserve O Gram*, may have applicability to other parks as well.

The following article first appeared in *GRIST*, a publication on practical aspects of park operations, produced by the NPS and the National Recreation and Park Association (see Vol. 30, No. 2, Spring 1986). The salvage cache described in this article is simply designed and contains basic supplies and equipment appropriate to a range of emergency needs. Parks can consider installing the caches, or an adaptation of them, and integrating them into their emergency training and planning program.

Keep in mind that no attempt should ever be made to salvage collections or other park resources when personal safety is in doubt. The availability of salvage caches or other salvage equipment should never encourage park staff to place themselves in dangerous situations. Such equipment may be of use to professional fire fighting crews, or to park staff in a variety of situations in which personal safety is not threatened.

### *Preparing Salvage Caches*

The Boy Scout motto, *Be prepared*, is good advice to anyone responsible for the protection of museum collections. Fire, broken water pipes, or damaging weather can strike at any time and without warning. To ensure the protection of valuable items, it is important to have an action plan and readily available supplies for use in the event of such disasters.

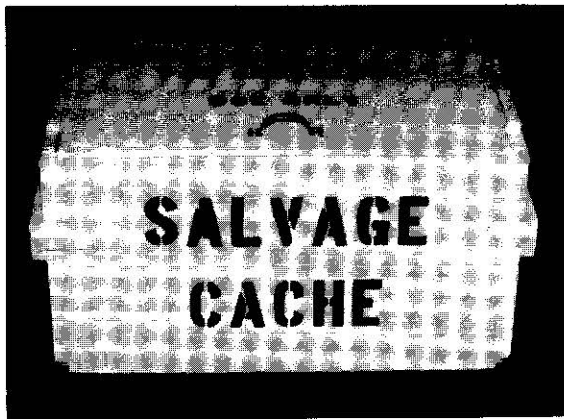
The Edison National Historic Site includes 23 buildings housing approximately 400,000 artifacts associated with Thomas Edison. To ensure the protection of these artifacts, a salvage plan has been developed and implemented. The plan includes a staff training program in salvage operations, coordination with the local fire department, and creation of supply caches for use in the operations.

Most disasters do not provide time for the removal of endangered artifacts. Unless a structure is in imminent danger of burning down or collapsing and thus destroying them, the most efficient way to protect artifacts is to protect them right where they are. This is accomplished by grouping the artifacts in the center of the room and covering them with tarps to protect against water and smoke damage. In larger rooms with many artifacts, items should be distributed into two or more groups to distribute the weight load over a larger area of the floor. To accomplish all this under emergency conditions requires a well-trained park staff. Each employee is assigned specific responsibilities. Individuals are designated to coordinate and direct the salvage operations

during an emergency. Employees are instructed not to enter endangered buildings unless directed by a salvage coordinator and then only with a partner. Employees are not to be in the building alone and may only enter if someone outside the building knows that they have gone inside.

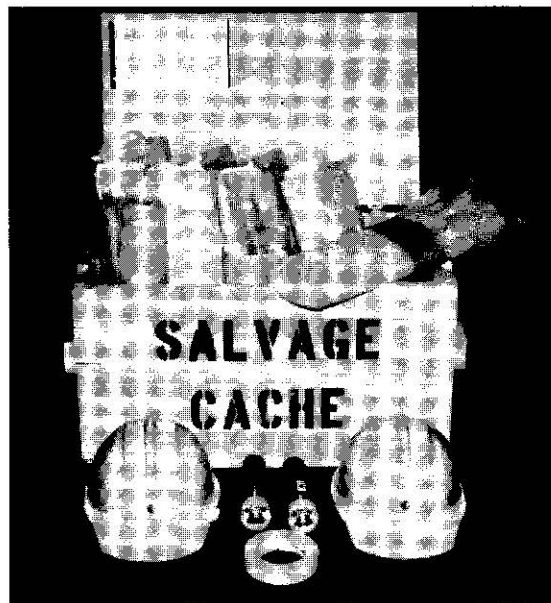
It is critical that the local fire department review and approve the salvage plan. In a fire situation, the fire department has total control over the burning building and can prevent park staff members from entering and carrying out salvage operations. The fire department is more likely to allow park staff into the building if it knows that the staff has been trained to follow an established plan. Allowing the fire department to review the plan has the added advantage of making it aware of the historical value of the park's collection and its special protection needs.

At the Edison National Historic Site, salvage caches are used to store supplies for use in these salvage operations. Each salvage cache is a box with a hinged lid, filled with ten or more plastic tarps, one roll of masking tape, two flashlights, two safety helmets, and a priority listing of artifacts to be salvaged. The amount of supplies and the dimensions of the boxes can be varied according to the number of artifacts to be protected. The caches are painted yellow and stenciled with large red letters reading *SALVAGE CACHE* and *FOR EMERGENCY USE ONLY*.



The tarps are 10 ft. x 10 ft., cut from commercially available 100-ft. rolls of plastic

sheeting and then rolled. The rolls are wrapped with a band of kraft paper, which holds each roll together but can be easily torn for removal. Masking tape is supplied to secure the tarps once they are in place. The flashlights and safety helmets are for use by the park staff involved in salvage operations. The safety helmets provide both safety for the employees and a way for the fire department to easily identify them as park staff. Flashlights and helmets are provided in pairs since the park staff are instructed not to enter an endangered building except with a partner.



The salvage caches are placed in strategic locations to provide for maximum protection. During training, the park staff are made familiar with their location and the need to utilize the supplies only for emergencies. All supplies are labelled *SALVAGE CACHE* to help ensure their proper use. Each salvage cache is inspected monthly for readiness.

In September 1985, the park's salvage plan was put to the test. Hurricane Gloria struck the New Jersey coast with severe winds and large amounts of rainfall. One of the park's historic structures houses visitor exhibits and the park's administrative offices. Rainwater from the building's leaking roof threatened artifacts as

well as administrative equipment and records. The park's salvage plan was immediately put into action and the salvage cache supplies were used to protect the contents of the building. By having the salvage plan in effect and the salvage caches in place, valuable time was saved in protecting these items from damage.

One can seldom predict when a disaster will strike. One can only plan ahead to help ensure the protection of those historic artifacts under our care and, like the Boy Scouts, *Be prepared*. A salvage plan and the salvage caches are one way to provide that protection.

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Photographs by author.

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### *Afterword*

Salvage caches were first installed at the Edison site in 1983, and the staff continue to maintain them. Since this article was written, the Edison staff have placed additional caches at the site and have installed breakable shackle padlocks on each cache. These padlocks can be unlocked with a key during checks and routine maintenance; however, during an emergency, they can be easily broken open by exerting pressure. This type of locking device discourages use of emergency supplies for day-to-day operations yet allows accessibility when needed. The following items have also been added to each cache: knee-high boots, heavy cotton work gloves, extension cords for fans, and luminescent light sticks that are activated when broken open.

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