



# Curatorial Safety

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## Safe Handling and Surveying

A large number of National Park Service sites possess historic structures, offices, maintenance buildings, basements, barns and other outbuildings, or additional enclosed areas that may be found to contain museum objects. This situation is very likely at newly-established units with existing structures and collections, but often occurs at older NPS sites, as well as with new acquisitions. How many times have you met with a potential donor to look at a treasure trove of historic newspapers and magazines, old tools, or other items in his/her barn or attic?

Museum objects that have been housed in such inappropriate locations will undoubtedly exhibit increased degradation and wear. At the same time, the objects are often found to be stained/soiled with insect, bird, and rodent droppings (and sometimes animal corpses), mold, mildew, dirt, etc. In order to protect curatorial staff from potential ill-health effects (allergies, sickness, or even serious diseases such as hantavirus, histoplasmosis, and rabies), there are some precautions that we can observe whenever handling such objects or conducting surveys in “old, dirty buildings”:

- Wear a respirator with a high-efficiency particulate air (N100 or HEPA) filter that is certified by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). **Note:** Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations require that employees be included in a Respiratory Protection Program, which requires that employees have medical clearance, be fitted with an appropriate respirator, and receive proper training prior to using a respirator.
  - Wear impervious gloves (i.e. nitrile, neoprene, butyl rubber, etc.) whenever handling suspect collections. Dispose of gloves following use.
  - When working in an area containing dead animals, droppings, etc., wear a Tyvek<sup>®</sup> jumpsuit to protect your clothes. Dispose of jumpsuit following use. Use a dilute (1:10) chlorine solution or Lysol disinfectant to spray on contaminated objects where possible, or follow procedures listed in “Protocol for Inspection and Decontamination of Paper Records Potentially Contaminated by Rodents” for decontamination of paper or other objects that can’t be disinfected with a liquid.
  - If you encounter a dead animal such as a rodent, spray it with disinfectant (dilute chlorine solution) prior to removing. Do not pick it up with your hands even if you are wearing gloves. Use a shovel or other tool to pick it up or move it. Use disinfectant spray, and/or HEPA vacuum, and wear appropriate personal protective equipment discussed above when cleaning up rodent droppings.
  - Prohibit activities that generate airborne dust or particulates such as shaking off dirt and debris, or blowing with compressed air. Be sure to use a HEPA vacuum when vacuuming is performed and avoid dry sweeping.
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- When finished, wash hands and all clothes thoroughly. When laundering your clothes, wash them separately from other laundry items.

Respirators with HEPA filters and neoprene gloves are available from industrial safety companies or large hardware, home improvement, and farm supply stores. Tyvek<sup>®</sup> jumpsuits are available at most paint and hardware stores.

For additional information, contact your park's Safety Officer and consult the following resources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at < <http://www.cdc.gov/>>.

DOI Protocol for Inspection and Disinfection of Paper Records Potentially Contaminated by Rodents at <<http://medical.smis.doi.gov/alerts/protwApp.pdf>>.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) at < <http://www.osha.gov/>>.

NPS *Conserve O Gram* series available on the web at < [http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/consveogram/cons\\_toc.html](http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/consveogram/cons_toc.html)>:

- 2/8 "Hantavirus Disease Health and Safety Update"
- 2/11 "Health and Safety Risks of Asbestos"
- 2/12 "Safe Techniques for Archival Surveying and Assessment"
- 2/13 "An Introduction to Respirator Use in Collections Management"

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