

Conservator Hack – Surviving COVID 19

I hope you have all had a chance to follow the Alberta Museums Association link given out in the last AMM Messenger on [Managing Your Museum's Pandemic Response](#). It offers practical advice on steps to take if for closing your museum due to COVID 19, as well as where to go for information on the virus. Please save it on your desktop or print it out, and share it with your colleagues.

Keep in mind that a pandemic does not affect a museum in the same way as a flood, wildfire or tornado. Buildings are not destroyed, and collections do not have to be packed out, salvaged or re-housed. The impact occurs through the incapacitation of people who care for the collections. Many museums in Manitoba are run by volunteers, often retired and sometimes elderly (hats off to the 93 yr.-old volunteer in the Parklands!). Since older adults have to take additional precautions to avoid infection, they may not be able to continue their museum functions.

If your museum is going to have to close unexpectedly, make sure that the building and the collection are secure, stable (environmentally speaking) and pest-free. Keep some heat on and check inside regularly for mice in traps, signs of forced entry, and dampness. The AMM has a number of drum hygrothermographs that can be borrowed free of charge for visual monitoring.

The pandemic looms large but like a tacky sign on the highway, it will soon be receding in our rear view mirrors. How can you best prepare for when the pandemic is over and your museum opens to the public again? Thanks to technology, you can continue to be involved in the care of your collections and museum without being on site. Work remotely with your Board and fellow staff/volunteers using social media (Zoom, Facetime, Skype) to set up a business continuity plan, if you don't already have one.

A community museum is often an important social centre. Are there ways that you can maintain a presence in your community during the pandemic, perhaps through online photo galleries or virtual tours? Is it possible to increase or even start your online presence through social media, using programs or apps such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram? There are students on extended spring break that might be able to do this for you remotely.

This might also be a good time to work on those administrative tasks that have been on the list. Does your institution have a 5-year plan? Are there policies that need to be written or updated? Future grant proposals that could be prepared?

If any collection care projects such as rehousing or storage reorganization are undertaken, please do **not** clean artifacts with any cleaning solutions intended for sanitation. The COVID virus can exist on surfaces for a period of time - usually hours - but will die without a host.

There has been a lot of emphasis on clean hands as a preventive measure against COVID 19. A thorough soap and water cleaning is preferred over hand sanitizer as it cleans well without residue, and soap may be easier to obtain than hand sanitizer. In case the soap-and-water approach is not practical and hand sanitizer is in short supply, the World Health Organization has a formula for making your own using isopropanol, hydrogen peroxide and glycerin: [Handrub Formulations](#). Let your hands dry after using sanitizer and before handling collections, to avoid transferring a residue. If in doubt, wear gloves.

This is a challenging time for the heritage community. If you have any concerns, feel free to contact me (the CSP Conservator) at conservator@museumsmanitoba.com.