

Covers for Outdoor Artifact Storage

By Jane Dalley, CSP Conservator

Are you one of the many museums that have large outdoor artifacts on your site? These might be train engines, agricultural equipment, automobiles, trucks, snowmobiles, fishing boats or aircraft. They might be on permanent display outdoors or stored outside awaiting repair.

Caring for these artifacts can be a challenge, and not only due to their size and weight. These artifacts have different preservation needs compared to smaller, household or domestic artifacts. They have moving parts that tend to seize up if they sit idle for too long. People with the skills to run and repair them are hard to find. Moving them takes planning, people and effort, especially if they are no longer in running condition.

The Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) has published several useful Notes on the subject and if you only read one Note, then let it be [Care of Machinery Artifacts Displayed or Stored Outside – CCI Notes 15/2](#) that can be found online as a downloadable pdf. It discusses the effects of weather exposure, pests, mould, dust and moisture on wood and metal components and makes practical suggestions on how to mitigate unsuitable conditions.

Covered storage is discussed and tarpaulins stretched over a wood or metal framework are recommended. For smaller artifacts, a pre-made portable carport or a [livestock cover/corral shelter](#) might be large enough. If you have to make a shelter from scratch, it can be difficult to find tarpaulins big enough at a hardware store. Fortunately, there are suppliers of larger sizes. ULINE supplies both regular and heavy-duty, woven, UV resistant tarpaulins that run up to 40ft x 60ft in size. For a custom project, [Trans-Canada Tarps](#) in St. Francois-Xavier makes portable shed covers and custom shade covers for frames. [Winkler Canvas](#) makes custom covers for agricultural machinery. Make sure that any design for a cover includes a frame that keeps the tarpaulin from touching the artifact.

If you have any questions about outdoor storage of artifacts, please contact me through the Cultural Stewardship Program at [conservator \(at\) museumsmanitoba \(dot\) com](mailto:conservator@ museumsmanitoba.com). I would be happy to help.

The AMM Cultural Stewardship Program (CSP) is a program available to all AMM members (and non-members for increased fees) designed to help museums with preventive conservation. It covers everything from storage and packing to facilities and buildings; CSP is a perfect tool to help you with your conservation issues! CSP offers a wide range of services such as: artifact assessment, information sessions for your board, emergency preparedness, loan of environmental and pest monitoring equipment, and one-on-one consultations to address your specific preventive conservation needs.

All CSP fees are being waived for Members until further notice to help reduce the impact of COVID-19 on museums.
