

## Introduction

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#### Resumen

*El Programa MEP relativo a las situaciones de urgencia en los museos es una iniciativa del ICOM. Pese al amplio acopio de documentación sobre este tema -impulsado en gran medida por la Convención de La Haya (1954) y la organización profesional Escudo Azul- y las facilidades para su difusión actual, en particular por conducto de Internet, la mayoría de los museos no han elaborado hasta la fecha planes de prevención contra las situaciones de emergencia.*

*Habida cuenta del incremento de las situaciones de inestabilidad política en todo el mundo - que suelen desembocar a menudo en conflictos armados - y las numerosas catástrofes naturales provocadas por los cambios climáticos, el Programa MEP se ha fijado como objetivo principal elaborar una antología de materiales de documentación que sea pertinente y útil para los profesionales de los museos.*

#### Résumé

*Le programme MEP relatif aux situations d'urgence dans les musées est une initiative de l'ICOM. Cependant, malgré la vaste documentation existante sur ce thème - produite sous l'impulsion, entre autres, de la Convention de La Haye (1954) et de l'organisation professionnelle du Bouclier Bleu - et les facilités pour y accéder, notamment par Internet, la plupart des musées du monde n'ont pas élaboré à ce jour des plans pour parer aux situations d'urgence. Eu égard à l'accroissement des instabilités politiques à travers le monde et les conflits armés qui souvent s'ensuivent, ainsi qu'aux nombreuses catastrophes naturelles provoquées par les changements climatiques, le programme MEP s'est assigné pour mission principale l'élaboration d'un ensemble choisi de matériel de documentation, pertinent et utile à la fois, pour les professionnels des musées.*

Emergency management: this is nothing new. Many disasters have taken place in the past and many lessons have been drawn from them. Many disaster plans have been drafted. Much inside knowledge has been gained. A wealth of experience and literature has been produced.

The Museums Emergency Programme is a daring project. It runs over a period of several years. Three major international committees operate within ICOM: ICOM-CC (ICOM International Committee for Conservation), ICOM-ICMS (ICOM International Committee for Museum Security), ICOM-ICTOP (ICOM International Committee for the Training of Personnel).

Conferences have been organized and recommendations made. One might therefore think that yet another programme or conference is just another addition to this series. Yes and no. Of course every well attended conference adds new insights and disseminates new experience and knowledge. But the Museums Emergency Programme is different, because it addresses exactly this issue. We know that there is much knowledge available, we know that there is much experience. But we also know that this treasure trove of information is not shared by many.

Have you ever heard about the experience of Chinese museums with floods? Have you ever shared the valuable experience gained after an earthquake in Turkey? Are professionals in China and Turkey aware of all the excellent material produced by the Getty Conservation Institute? Has any native English speaker read all the reports on the floods in Germany and the Czech Republic written in German and Czech? Does anybody know about an important meeting on emergencies in the Netherlands, a meeting held in Dutch only? Does a museum in Hyderabad know where to find documentation and training programmes? These are rhetorical questions. Yes, much has been produced, but what we need to know is to bring all this knowledge together on a level designed to reach out globally.

Our goal is not to produce the ultimate database. What we are trying to do is sift through all this information, be it in written form or only available in the memory of professionals, and provide ourselves and our colleagues with a selection of useful material.

We will make this selection available in the form of training material, specifically targeting regional development, creating self-sustained networks equipped with basic instruments and reference material. The emphasis is on simple, practical and affordable approaches. This is an ambitious undertaking and there are various challenges arising with our ambitions.

First of all we all suffer from information overload. There are more and more people nowadays who do not even dare open their e-mail box when coming back from a holiday or a meeting. Some of you, of course, carry your e-mail box with you in your laptops. And look at the challenge of finding the right information on the web. Everything's there, but try to find it. And the more information becomes available, the more frequently one hears the question, and in every organisation: "Why have I not been informed?" It is a real dilemma. So, knowing what information is available, making it accessible in a user-friendly way is one of the things the MEP programme should focus on.

Secondly, as stated, we need to select information that is simple and practical. Although everyone may learn a lot from the emergency plans of big rich institutions, the vast majority of the museums may never have the means to copy them. While often overlooked, there are already existing traditional approaches which may be as helpful, for instance preventive measures against hurricanes in Caribbean islands.

Looking at emergencies, it may seem there is a great difference between earthquakes, floods or war situations. It is true, of course, that many

elements differ, but there are just as many things that may be similar. A fire brings water damage. A war brings fires and sometimes flooding, as in Yugoslavia where the film archive was flooded because of water seeping in after a bomb attack. In all instances, there is the issue of moving objects to safe places. A museum with an emergency plan for evacuating personnel and objects may already be equally prepared for flood, fire or war.

The curators of the National Museum of Iraq saw the war coming and removed important objects to safer places. The museum in Prague as we will learn in one of the contributions to this workshop, was warned of advancing floods, but the time was shorter, although they did what they could. If there is a sudden fire, one of course has to fight quite another battle.

We sent out a questionnaire to get as much information on data available as possible and conducted some fact-finding missions to selected countries to get a broader picture; and we organised this meeting in Hyderabad and designed it so that many organisations would be represented.

One would hope that most museums in the world have some form of emergency preparedness plan available. Unfortunately this is not the case. Many museums have no, or only very limited, plans for emergency situations. One important element of the MEP programme could be to provide some standard formats for simple emergency plans.

It is, of course, important to be prepared, hence the Museums Emergency Programme. Being prepared is always better, but it is equally important to know how to deal with a situation once disaster has struck and the only thing to do is to deal with the consequences. Evacuating objects in time is the best thing to do, but if you can't, you must know, for example, how to deal effectively with water damage.

As I said before, a great deal of information is already available, but not always in the language of the country of a given museum. Who, except for those of you who speak Japanese, have learned about the detailed recommendations, written in Japanese, after the Kobe earthquake? Have Japanese museum professionals been able to carefully go through the outcome of the meeting on emergencies in Draguignan, produced in French? Translations may therefore be an important element of the MEP programme.

Training will be an important element of the MEP programme, and therefore close cooperation with ICOM-ICTOP will also be important. The Getty Conservation Institute and ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property) together with ICOM will develop a curriculum and learning strategies that will allow museum professionals to understand and be skilled in the theoretical and practical aspects of integrated emergency management.