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The SPNHC Guidelines

Introduction

The SPNHC *Guidelines for the Care of Natural History Collections* were endorsed by the SPNHC Council in May 1994 and were published in *Collection Forum* 10(1): 32-40. They are reprinted, with permission, in full here.

The purpose of the SPNHC Guidelines is to advocate an institutional framework that advances professional standards of management and care of collections. The basis of the framework is **preventive** conservation and recognition of primary institutional responsibilities for use, management and care of specimens. The *raison d'être* for producing the Guidelines was the transformation of the management of collections given the high profile that museums enjoy, the frequency and diversity of collections use, and the sophistication of information technology and conservation research. SPNHC felt that it is vital to balance the wise use of collections with sound conservation practice and produced the Guidelines to help enable this. The Guidelines cover collections in the fields of anthropology, earth sciences and life sciences as well as associated library and archival materials.

Comparing the Guidelines with documents produced in the UK suggests they are probably akin to the MGC Registration documents and the Museums Association's *Codes of Practice*. The Guidelines, like these documents, are based on a broadly accepted philosophy of the responsibilities of caring for collections, both for the institution and the individual. This type of document is a compliment to the *Standards* documents produced by the MGC for Biological and Geological Collections (MGC, 1992 & 1993). The *Standards* represent a consensus of the current professional opinion of **best practice** and are practical documents with specific targets rather than policy statements. Both subject-specific documents (the Guidelines and the *Standards* documents) cover similar areas although some differences were noted. In particular the Guidelines do not have any mention of disposal policies (presumably an active decision) which are dealt with fully by all MGC documents. The SPNHC document does emphasize that the guidelines *must take into consideration the reality of large*

quantities of specimens. This consideration is hinted at but never really discussed in the *Standards* documents, and is a reality which natural history curators cannot ignore.

Jane Pickering

Museums & Galleries Commission (MGC) 1992.
Standards in the Museum Care of Biological Collections,
Museums & Galleries Commission, London, U.K. 55pp.

Museums & Galleries Commission (MGC) 1993.
Standard in the Museum Care of Geological Collections,
Museums & Galleries Commission, London, U.K. 57pp.

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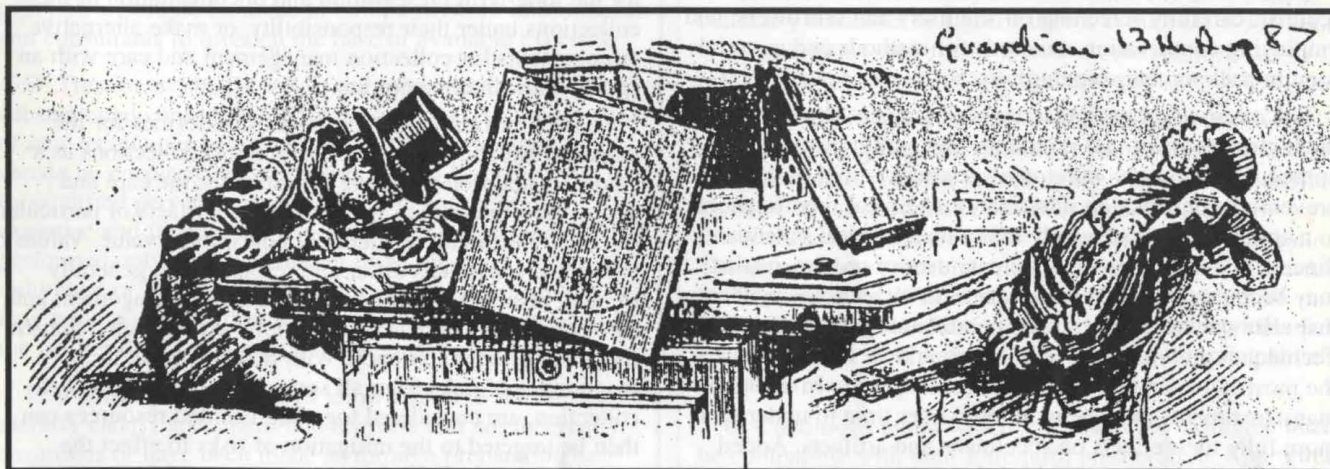
GUIDELINES FOR THE CARE OF NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS

Society For The Preservation Of Natural History Collections (SPNHC)

I. Premise

A. Inherent value of specimens: Specimens in natural history collections are preserved to document presence in given localities at a given time, to validate past research, and to be available for research and other educational purposes. Specimens are collected as a sample of a region's natural and cultural environment (past and present), then are often prepared in some fashion so as to make them useful for research, exhibition, or educational purposes. Subsequent preparation, sampling, or destructive analysis may be necessary to fulfill the goals of research or legitimate educational uses. Research enhances the value of specimens.

B. Balance between use and preservation: Associated with the responsibility of ongoing research and educational use is the obligation of the institution to maximize the value of each specimen for future use. This applies not only to the data associated with each specimen, but also to the physical and chemical integrity of the specimen. Thus, it is critical that the demands placed on natural history specimens for current research and educational uses are balanced with the need for preservation of the specimens for future uses.



Victorian view: two ways of working at the museum. Mary Evans Picture Library