

The Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts plans MayDay emergency preparedness activities

Philadelphia, PA, April 6, 2009 -- The Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA), the United States' largest paper-based art conservation lab, is coordinating in-house disaster planning activities to coincide with the Society for American Archivists (SAA)'s May Day. Staff will engage in a series of tabletop exercises designed to simulate potential dangers to people and collections. From a leaking roof, to a smoky fire, to a nearby chemical leak, potential hazards to collections materials can take many forms. Teams of conservators, technicians and administrators will brainstorm how to protect the materials undergoing treatment at CCAHA and how to ensure the health and safety of workers and visitors.

MayDay, as a day devoted to caring for and protecting valuable records and artifacts, was established by the archivists at the Society of American Archivists (SAA) (www.archivists.org) and is promoted by Heritage Preservation (www.heritagepreservation.org). For MayDay, archivists and other cultural heritage professionals take personal and professional responsibility for doing something simple to mitigate the risk of disaster for cultural heritage collections and their staff – something that can be accomplished in a day but that can have a significant impact on an individual's or a repository's ability to respond.

“CCAHA is marking MayDay by conducting tabletop disaster response exercises, prompting our highly trained conservation staff to think of the potential risks to the collections in our care and ways to protect those materials in the event of emergency situations,” said Ingrid Bogel, CCAHA's Executive Director.

As an organization that assists cultural heritage institutions with their own disaster planning, CCAHA has well-developed existing procedures in place for responding to emergency situations. Flip chart Emergency Guides are in place at each telephone, keeping emergency contact information and guidelines for response at hand. Collections materials under conservation treatment are protected in a heavily secured and locked vault with a dedicated fire suppression system, in addition to superior fire detection and suppression in the wider laboratory. Human health and safety protections include eye wash stations, regularly inventoried first aid kits and emergency shut-offs for power equipment. Regular visits from security and fire personnel elicit risk reduction suggestions from first-responder professionals that are implemented into new procedures, equipment and detection systems.

Annual exercises like this MayDay activity, in addition to a regularly-updated written emergency response and recovery plan, keep CCAHA staff prepared for unexpected hazardous or destructive events and poised to protect the collections materials in their care.

The Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) is the largest nonprofit conservation laboratory in the country. CCAHA's mission is to provide expertise and leadership in the preservation of the world's cultural heritage. CCAHA specializes in the treatment of works of art, artifacts on paper and photos; housing and framing services for paper-based objects; and digitization services. CCAHA also offers on-site consultation services, educational programs and seminars, internships, and emergency conservation services.

For additional information,
Contact: Kim Andrews
Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts
215-545-0613
215-735-9313
kandrews@ccaaha.org
www.ccaaha.org

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