

## **Transport of Dangerous Goods in Museums** **- Suzanne Ryder, NHM, London**

International rules governing the transport of dangerous goods are constantly changing and becoming more stringent. The regulations apply to movement of specimens and products used within museums. I was alerted to this at a SPNHC (Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections) meeting in Canada, 2002, and again in U.S.A., 2003. This subject is being taken very seriously in many museums worldwide as a result of fines, and in one case, the threat of imprisonment. Although this issue is particularly relevant to science departments, the implications are much wider.

One other area for clarification is where a specimen doesn't fall into the "dangerous goods" category but may contravene security regulations e.g. entomological pins do not pose a "dangerous goods" risk but they are considered a security risk during transportation. Parcel Force state on their website the materials they will not transport and a lot of the things museums send out regularly are on that list.

There are several gaps in our arrangements for transporting specimens to and from museums: scientific loans, exhibition loans, fieldwork collecting, hand carrying material. However, working through the legislation to find out what is relevant to museums is near impossible. After a preliminary discussion with an external Dangerous Goods Safety Advisor it became apparent that there is a real need to pursue this issue. It seems that it is not only institutions that would be liable, but also the individuals carrying or shipping the specimens or other items.

In response to this problem, The Natural History Museum, London set up an internal Transport of Dangerous Goods Working Group to investigate the implications and provide recommendations to the Museums' management. Representatives from relevant departments provided lists of what they perceived to be dangerous goods. This proved difficult, as the definition of dangerous goods was not clear from the literature available. We were unable to decide which materials constituted dangerous goods, we were unsure whether we really did have a problem with this issue or not, added to which the legislation is extremely complex and varies between countries and with the means of transport (air, road, rail or sea). It was not an easy issue to resolve without professional expertise. We therefore felt it necessary to seek professional advice on the various issues, and invited three specialist firms to discuss what assistance they might offer the NHM with regard to the Transport of Dangerous Goods.

After listening to the presentations and asking many questions, the working group found that our needs as a museum were as follows:

- An assessment of all NHM sites to identify dangerous goods and advise how we might change working practises to avoid dangerous goods transportation where possible.
- Staff training.
- A dangerous goods carrier for the whole Museum.
- Ongoing advice of a Dangerous Goods Safety Advisor to inform us of changing legislation.

If we do need to use a dangerous goods carrier, it is important to be aware of the cost implications. It is also necessary to ensure that material is returned to us from other institutes in the same way, so this should be reflected in our Collections Management Policy and Procedures, and this needs to be communicated to all museums receiving dangerous goods loans and packages and an agreed procedure established.

This is a serious issue facing museums and one that we cannot ignore. It is my recommendation to all museums to seek advice from a Dangerous Goods Safety Advisor. The requirements of each museum are different, and legislation seems to change frequently. A Dangerous Goods Safety Advisor may be able to save a museum money by suggesting changes to working practices, rather than sending everything out by a dangerous goods courier which is expensive.

*Background information for this article was derived from an NHM working group Report on "The Transporting of Dangerous Good" produced by Suzanne Ryder, Clare Valentine Jan Beccaloni, Bob Oldfield, Alison Paul, and Andy Warlow, March 2004.*