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## NSCG Newsletter

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## **SVPCA/SPPC BOOKING REMINDER**

Dear VPer, as well as Preparators and Conservators

The Symposia on Vertebrate Palaeo and Comparative Anatomy, and the Symposium for Conservators and Preparators, are scheduled for the period 10-14 September 2002 and the details and booking form were circulated in the 2nd circular.

Unfortunately, because of administrative delays in the Department here, the forms went out a little late (not posted until early May) and contained an end May deadline for booking accommodation. This has put a lot of pressure on you all to finalise arrangements quite quickly. The deadline for talk and poster abstracts is the end of June so there is not quite so much pressure for these.

This information, including a downloadable conference booking form, and a web-page on which short abstracts can be submitted, is up on the SVPCA website:

<http://www.svpca.org>

A great many of you have not yet finalised your applications in order to book places, talks, posters and accommodation at the meeting. Our closing date was the end of May - primarily because of pressure to confirm conference booking figures with the accommodation officer at Emmanuel College, but I will try to hold them off. In the meantime....

**PLEASE SEND IN YOUR BOOKING FORM SOON!**

Many thanks,  
Dave Norman and the Host Committee

## **Papers presented at the 2002 Conference**

Part I - The Mechanics Of Moving or 'Nuts, Bolts, Magnets and Springs'

*You've Got To Move Before You Move*

*Oskar Brandenburg and Andries J. van Dam, Leiden Museum of Anatomy*

The Leiden Museum of Anatomy houses the largest anatomical collection in the Netherlands, which consists of 20,000 macroscopic specimens and 1.3 million microscopic specimens. This collection represents medical education and research of the last four centuries. The fact that the collections are stored at different locations at the old academic hospital and have always been stored without environmental control makes maintenance difficult. Recently, the Museum of Anatomy planned to move to new accommodation. The change of accommodation will provide the museum with a unique opportunity to improve their collection management and care. The mission of the move, whilst minimizing the transit risks, was to improve the storage conditions, enhance the accessibility and keep control of the cost.

A precise and efficient plan is necessary in order to benefit the utmost from this situation. The activities necessary to make the move run smoothly can be divided into three phases.

- Selection and de-accessioning
- Conservation
- Actual move

The main purpose of selection and de-accessioning is to maintain or upgrade the quality of the collection. Due to the decrease in the size of the collection, the collection becomes more manageable. Collections are divided in an A, B, C or D-category.

- Category A contains objects or collections that are indispensable and absolutely unique within the Medical Collections of the Netherlands; they show an essential phase or visualise an important event in the development of science and / or are a clear remembrance of those who were or are of cogent importance to Dutch culture, science or academic history.
- Objects or collections which are attractive or presentable and often used in exhibitions fall into Category C. They can be a carrier of publicised data or contain information that is important for testing new discoveries or new scientific understanding.
- Those objects that do not fulfil the A and B requirements, but nonetheless have an important role within the institutions and the Medical Collections of

the Netherlands are designated C. In general these objects or collections are of local importance.

- The remainder that do not fit into the policy of the collection plan and don't have a scientific value within the Medical Collections of the Netherlands will be considered for de-accessioning. These can be those that are in an irreversibly bad physical condition, have no documentation at all or are over-represented in the collection. Even though this will reduce the expenses of the actual move, it should never influence the decision-making process.

Before moving the objects, the conditions should be measured in order to avoid possible damage of the objects during the transportation of the museum collection. To be able to move an object, the object should first of all be in a stable physical condition. For instance, skeleton mountings should be stable and containers should be well sealed. Secondly, the collection should be free of fungus and pests. This will reduce the risk of biological infestations. Thirdly, objects that lack registration should be given a minimal registration. When the new storage facilities are ready, an additional movement-registration can be applied. This will enable the museum to track down and follow each object during the move. The final phase is the actual move, which revolves around three main activities, namely packing, transport and unpacking and placing at the new location. In order to reduce risks of damage to the specimens during the move, the museum has developed standardized packing and storage methods

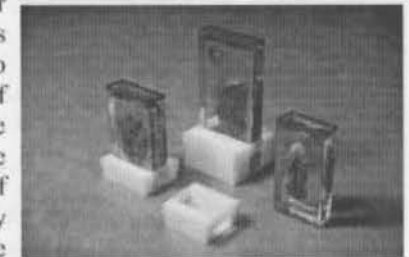
Due to high building costs in our country, the Board of Directors demanded that the Museum try to reduce storage space as much as possible. Cost saving solutions have been considered by the museum, however solely the ones which did not interfere with the previously mentioned aims. With regard to the move the museum collection has been divided into three groups of objects:

- The dry collection (for instance, skeletons, bones and models in wax)
- The wet collection (all fluid preserved specimens)
- The microscopic collection

During the move, the packing methods should provide physical support and protection as well as uniformity and efficiency in materials and methods. An efficient manner to reduce costs is to pack the collection in such a way that it is able to integrate directly into its new storage system. This way, the packaging forms part of the storage system. To provide improved long-term storage, the packing materials to be used should be durable and emission free, while specific needs should be catered for, for example, the packing methods for the dry and microscopic collection must be dust-free. It is preferable to use light and easy to handle materials, but packing used for only transport purposes can be of a lower standard in quality. A storage system should provide physical support and protection, and

should enhance the accessibility while maintaining an efficient use of space. A well-designed storage system improves collection management, by enhancing accessibility but at the same time avoiding unnecessary manipulation of objects. It is actually the main form of preventive conservation.

As mentioned previously, the financial aspect should be taken into consideration by trying to occupy less space in comparison with the old situation. This can be accomplished by two ways. Firstly, the well-known Compactor-system®. These units make it possible to reduce the walking paths between the cabinets, which can double the storage capacity or reduce the storage area necessary. However, this method is only applicable for storing the dry and microscopic collections. Storing the wet collection with the Compactor-system® involves a very high risk of damage to our fragile glass specimen containers. Consequently, for the wet collection the museum has chosen another space saving solution. Replacing cabinets with small shelf depth with cabinets with deep drawers increases the storage capacity by about 50%. When using cabinets with fixed shelves, the object can only be accessed at the front. In order to store the object in a more accessible manner, the jars are not placed behind one another, which makes it necessary to use shelves with small depth, and consequently more pathways. Placing the jars in deep drawers enables you to place them behind one another, because now you have access from four sides; namely both sides, the front and above. To avoid movement of the jars when using the drawer, the inside is covered by soft polyethylene foam. A small part of the collection consists of jars with a small bottom surface. Those jars will easily topple over when the drawer is opened. For this reason, the museum has developed support elements made of corrugated polypropylene board and Ethafoam® blocks glued together with a low-melt Ethylene Vinyl Acetate, better known as EVA. Sometimes these supports become bulky and therefore inefficient. To eliminate this problem, another kind of support is developed for these very unstable jars, slightly slanting and integrated in the drawer. The jars are deliberately placed off the perpendicular in such a way that they receive support from the back and ensure that they do not fall over. The side is made of curved steel boards, covered with polyethylene foam at the sides. Blocks of Ethafoam® separate the jars.



#### **Packing methods and materials**

For transport, the fluid preserved specimens are placed in boxes on wheels.

Putting foam rubber between the jars is a simple but efficient method of avoiding damage during transport, with the advantage that the jars remain visible. Vulnerable jars with thin glass are wrapped in thirteen-millimeter thick air-cap-foil before being placed in boxes and the less vulnerable screw top jars are placed in standard air-cap-foil pouches.

The storage and packaging of microscopic preparations demands care to avoid breaking the glass or cracking the glass cover slip. It's preferable to store slides flat for the following reasons (Goodway, 1995). The resins used as mounting media can be unstable, become brittle, crack or never harden completely. Also the adhesive on paper labels can dry out and loosen. Storing the slides vertically could allow the samples and labels to fall off, which makes it impossible to identify them. The museum has developed a storage system for the microscopic slides. The slides are placed on a corrugated polypropylene board with a framework, which protects the slides from damage. Slides are protected from dust and light by placing the boards in an acid-free cardboard box. In this condition the collection can be transported without damage. The use of a translucent board allows the boards to be placed on a dazzle-light, which makes it easy to survey the condition of the mounting media of the slides.

The dry collection consists of skeletons, bones, and models in wax. Ligaments and preserved skeletons are fragile objects, and for this reason it's preferable to pack the skeletons so that contact-damage is avoided. The skeletons are placed in a half-open box made of acid-free cardboard and the pedestal is fixed with polyethylene to a foam plank. The support rod emerging from the pedestal is fixed with a wire to the back of the box. A piece of Ethafoam® is curved around the skeleton as an extra buffer. The box will also form part of the new storage system. The packing and storage method of loose bones provides object-cushioned support. The bones are packed in cardboard boxes. To protect the objects, the box is divided in partitions by folded soft polyethylene foam. This is a quick and cheap method to protect the bones during transport.

Bones of fetuses are extremely vulnerable. Together with their pedestal, the bones are placed in a box. The rod of the foot is pinched in a little cut in an Ethafoam® plank, which is fixed with EVA on the bottom of the box. The packed bones are ready for transport and can be directly placed in the new storage system. At a later

stage, the boxes will be provided with a window in the lid made of PET – foil that prevents unnecessary manipulation of the objects.

Models in wax are also very vulnerable. It is recommended to pack in such a manner that damage, caused by packing-material is prevented. By fastening only the wooden foot on a board, it is possible to transport the objects in a box without the risk of contact damage. The bigger ones are placed on a wooden board and fixed with strips of corrugated polypropylene board. Using headless nails makes it easy to apply and remove the stretched strips. Little models are fixed with Ethafoam® blocks. After transport the models are placed without board in a stable, dust-free cabinet.

### Conclusion

Although the presented methods are different, we have accomplished the reduction of a large variety of packing and storage materials. The museum has developed packing methods that are able to integrate directly into it's new storage system. As a result, the whole microscopic collection will be packed and stored in identical boxes to the major part of the dry collection. Both collections can be stored in uniform cabinets. This gives not only a higher efficiency in packing and moving, it also reduces the costs of the storage system. For the wet collection the museum has chosen a storage system with deep drawers. This will increase the storage capacity and enhance the accessibility.

In our opinion, it is essential that activities such as selection and de-accessioning and conservation are part of planning the move of a museum collection. These projects are necessary to achieve the expected improvement in collection management. In other words "You have got to move, before you move".

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