

Bulletin 26: Treatment of Archaeological Materials

An important objective of archaeological investigations is to understand the context and association of materials with each other and *in situ* materials. Objects recovered from archaeological sites are the only remaining material evidence from past human activities and we need to preserve what we have recovered of the archaeological record. Consider future analysis, where new methods and techniques are applied and more can be learned. The ultimate goal stabilises cultural materials, ensuring delivery to a repository in the best possible condition.

To promote consistency in the “preservation through record” of archaeological sites that cannot be avoided, Bulletin 26 provides general guidelines for the field collection, initial inventory, and stabilization of cultural materials and samples.

Know your limitations and seek advice from specialists as appropriate.

This bulletin does not provide prescriptive direction but defines expectations on the outcome of the treatment of cultural materials under permits authorized by the *Heritage Conservation Act*. Activities under consideration include:

- Excavation;
- Recording;
- Transport;
- Cleaning;
- Analysis; and
- Storage.

General principles of conservation:

- **Planning:** Anticipate potential cultural materials likely to be identified. Research conservation techniques prior to recovery and have a plan to deal with cultural materials.
- **Timeline:** Do not delay treatment; have a plan prior to recovery and implement as soon as required.
- **Extent of Conservation:** Use the simplest procedures with the least intervention, only increasing as necessary.
- **Environment:** Consider environmental settings. For example, storage of organic materials for extended periods of time in humid conditions (*i.e.*, sealed containers) or saturated materials in dry conditions can result in adverse impacts.
- **Cleaning:** Consider an appropriate cleaning regime specific to materials on a case by case basis. Dirt may provide stability and protection. Conversely, handling, transporting, and storing dirty materials can have disastrous effects. Meanwhile, aggressive cleaning can remove residues and affect surface modifications.
- **Security:** Address protection and access to cultural materials. Consider appropriate receptacles and packing materials for transportation and storage. Sensitive items (*e.g.*, human remains) may require additional considerations and consultation.
- **Documentation:** Document all procedures including labels, photographs, drawing, notes, analyses, and reports.