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PROTECTING YOUR POSSESSIONS AGAINST BUSHFIRE

The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material has released an information sheet ***STORING COLLECTIONS IN HIGH BUSHFIRE RISK AREAS*** aimed at assisting individuals and those working with cultural collections to reduce the risks of fire when storing their precious possessions. The National Gallery of Victoria supports AICCM in its effort to educate the public about reducing the risk of fire to cultural heritage items. The NGV has participated in AICCM's response to the Black Saturday fires alongside the Public Records Office Victoria; National Archives of Australia, Melbourne; The Powerhouse Museum, Sydney; the Centre for Cultural Material Conservation; the State Library of Victoria; Museum Victoria; Heritage Victoria; Archival Survival; Arts Victoria and Blue Shield Australia.

Since the Black Saturday fires, we all recognise that fires of a catastrophic degree can cause extreme damage on a scale previously unimagined. However, stories that have emerged from the experience tell us also that some treasures did survive. Even some paper-based items miraculously endured intense heat, soot and fire. With careful storage and by using heat-resistant materials, certain risks can be reduced. While not a guarantee that items will not suffer damage, minimising risk through the storage methods recommended may offer some hope for items that have to be left behind on evacuation.

STORING COLLECTIONS IN HIGH BUSHFIRE RISK AREA information sheet is being sent to arts and cultural heritage organizations, local councils, and emergency service providers. It can also be found on AICCM's website www.aiccm.org.au.

As you prepare your fire plans to minimise risks to your home, consider which of your precious possessions you wish to take with you if you have to evacuate. These may include photo albums, jewellery and other small objects. Pack them so they are insulated from heat, water and vibration and have them ready to take with you, should fires threaten your home.

If you are affected by fires, the AICCM encourages you to retain any damaged keepsakes and memorabilia that are still recognisable, even if damaged and dirty. Consult a conservator before you throw them away. It is possible that they may be salvageable.

It is vital that people don't risk their safety when attempting to salvage items. Protective clothing, gloves, shoes and face masks should be worn. (Look for masks with at least a 'P2' rating). Home sites should be assessed for structural stability by emergency professionals before people enter damaged buildings.

The AICCM website contains further information about the handling and care of salvaged items, particularly those damaged by fire or water. Alternatively, contact a conservator in your state for further information. Conservators can be contacted via the AICCM website or through state and national cultural institutions. The AICCM is the professional organisation for conservators in Australia. Its website is: <http://www.aiccm.org.au>