

# BUILDING AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE NETWORK FOR BC COLLECTIONS

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## Evolution of the BC HERN

Conservators from the larger BC museums have been involved in numerous emergency response and collections salvage incidents over the past few years. These experiences have made the need for an organized approach to heritage disaster response in BC apparent. To explore this idea, a Museums Assistance Program (MAP) grant was secured to develop a framework for the BC Heritage Emergency Response Network (BC HERN).



Top: UBC MOA flood, 2014.

Above: BC HERN Emergency Response and Collection Salvage Workshop, 2016

## Baby Steps

Several BC conservators attended the 2016 AIC/CAC Building Emergency Response and Salvage Decision Making Skills workshop in Montreal, gaining valuable experience and meeting with the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI)'s preservation development advisor. Later that year, those same BC conservators and others hosted a similar workshop, funded by MAP, at the Royal BC Museum, to train a group of more than 30 conservation and collections management professionals. The format of the Heritage Salvage Response Workshop was 'Train the Trainers', and it was intended to enhance the skill level of the people who may be called upon to assist in salvage response. The workshop program covered a range of content that included health and safety, case studies, hands-on examples of salvage damage, salvage scenario planning and an introduction to the disaster response workbook being developed by the CCI.

The MAP grant also funded the creation of two mobile emergency response kits. These may be used to create mobile collections-salvage labs, providing dry and clean work environments outside an impacted institution. One kit will be housed on the south coast of mainland BC and one on Vancouver Island.



Right: BC HERN salvage kit #1.

In 2017 a Statement of Cooperation was signed by the larger BC arts and culture institutions with conservation staff. Senior administrators and directors from the Museum of Anthropology, the Royal BC Museum, the City of Burnaby, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Museum of Vancouver and the Vancouver Archives have agreed to collaborate through the BC HERN, to offer assistance and response to emergencies, when requested and within reason, and to participate in joint disaster preparedness initiatives. This network is intended to supplement and enhance the assistance available through the CCI and conservators working in private practice.

Also in 2017 BC HERN conservators delivered a panel discussion at the annual meeting of the BC Museums Association to inform the BC cultural community and to solicit input from the membership.

## The Future of the BC HERN

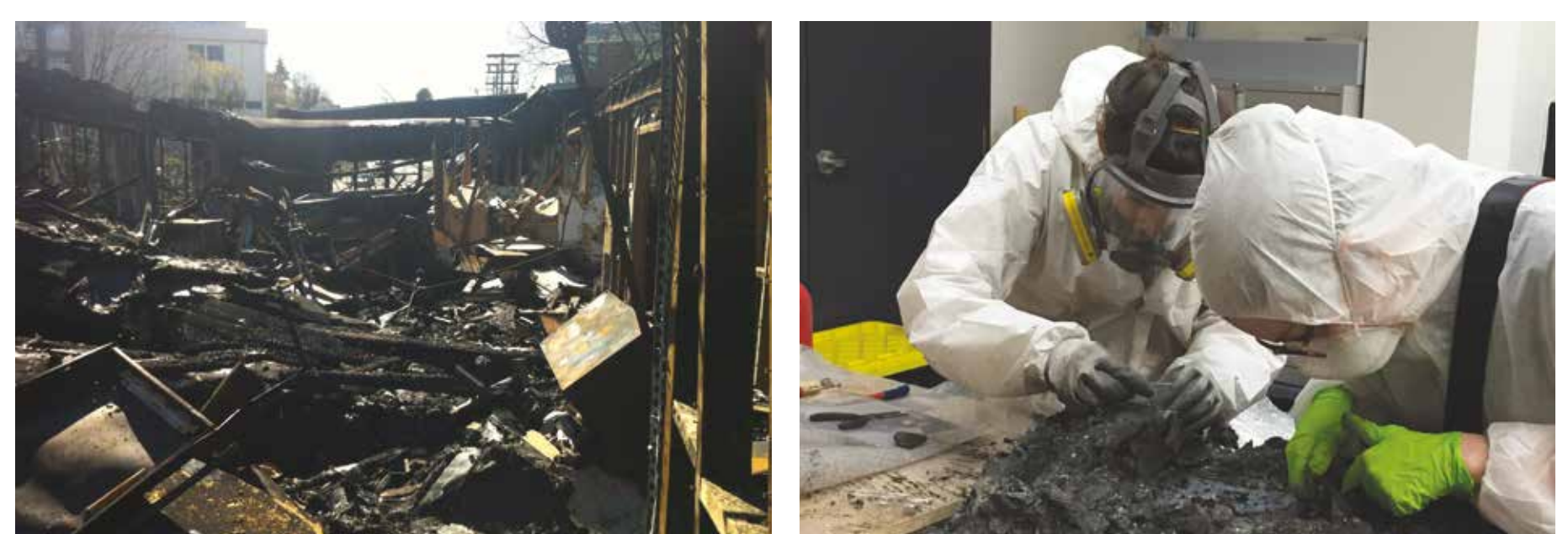
The remaining challenge is to determine how this network can be broadened to include smaller museums and cultural centres throughout the province—institutions that do not have conservation resources. It is clear that the infrastructure and ongoing support of such a network must be sustainable and centrally coordinated. Conversations with the BC Museums Association are proceeding and have also been initiated with the Canadian Museums Association and the Canadian Association for Conservation. Coordination with the CCI is also critical. Another partnership to be explored is with the Association of Archives of BC (AABC) Fraser Valley Region, which already has an agreement in place among the members to support each other during disaster response and collections salvage incidents.



Above: Conservators removing soot from collections in a mobile emergency response lab in 2013.

The next phase of this project will focus on partnership development and sustainable funding models. A broader network will be established beyond the large urban centres of southern BC. Additional salvage supply kits as well as ongoing training will also be explored.

An established and well-supported BC HERN will benefit museums across the province through access to ongoing training, critical collections salvage supplies and a network of local and distant response teams. The hope is that this will serve as a model that can be used to develop similar networks across Canada.



Left: Archaeologists' office after a fire, 2016.  
 Right: Salvaging artifacts after the fire.