

In This Issue

- **Cultural Asset Theft**

Risk management improves strategic outcomes.

Special Events are Special Risks
Summer is here – do you have this reference guide to special event management?

Cultural Asset Theft

There are numerous risks to cultural property. One of the most common, yet least reported, is the theft of cultural assets from Canada's museums. According to the RCMP "Every year millions of dollars are lost due to the theft of objects from museums, art galleries, libraries, archives, and places of worship".

While some thefts are planned; others are "crimes of opportunity." Often good security practices and equipment will discourage thieves with both proclivities.

Using standard risk management processes, begin by identifying threats (where, how and why a theft is likely to occur) before moving on to prioritizing the various types of theft (by employee, volunteer or third party). When prioritizing by frequency and severity this situation requires you to identify target assets then scaling prevention and protection measures according to priority. In some cases, the attractiveness of objects may vary depending on current events (e.g. articles relating to a respected world leader who has recently died) or the value of similar artifacts selling for unexpected high values at auction.

Some small items may be relatively valuable, are easy to conceal and require particular protection based on the relative ease with which they may be stolen.

Often small items may be gone for quite some time before it is noticed. For example, the British Library reported 8,000 books missing since moved to a new premises in 1998; staff first believed the books had been mis-shelved or incorrectly catalogued.

Without a thorough inventory record clearly and completely describing the artifact, it may be impossible to recover it. Depending on its origin artifacts may be readily saleable on the black market – whether it is desirable on its own or as part of a set.

When developing the security plan, consider both inside and outside the premises. Below is an outline of minimal considerations:

Exterior

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– parking, walkways and other exterior spaces

Interior:

- 1) public areas (public entrance, galleries, washrooms, shops, meeting rooms);
- 2) restricted areas (loading dock, preparation areas, administrative, utility rooms);
- 3) high-risk areas (storage vaults, conservation workshops, offices with high-value artifacts, IT server room, etc.)

Some facilities look to admission fees for operational income. A collection boasting important or valuable artifacts is a huge draw for visitors. Loss of these attractive items may result in a down-turn in visits, at least for a short period. Insurance coverage for loss of income is likely available, and may be feasible if the expected lost income will significantly affect the museum's budget.

In summary, cultural artifacts are tangible connections to our history, customs, social values and backgrounds. Items of cultural heritage provide a physical expression showing where we came from, how we lived and belonged within our society. It creates a better understanding of previous generations and the history of where we come from.

As risk managers, we need to see cultural artifacts as real assets of our community. It is only right to give these assets the protection they need.

For more detailed information, visit:

<http://www.ilam.org/ILAMDOC/doc-admin/Security-manual.pdf>

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