



Guidance for Protest Preparedness at Cultural Institutions

Developed in Collaboration with the DC AFR

When preparing for protests or political unrest, remember that health and safety of institution staff is priority. Do not make any decisions that would put staff in direct harm. All the suggestions below would only be utilized after an assessment of the institution's risk. They are also not the only measures that can be taken; use past experience as part of the risk assessment to identify mitigation and preparedness measures. Anticipating the diversity of tactics can be difficult, but basic preparedness can protect art, culture, and institutions. Protestors and looters (criminal activity) are often not the same people and should be considered as different risks.

1. **Barriers:** Decide if any physical or psychological barriers are needed to protect the cultural assets. These barriers can be:
 - a. Plywood on windows (careful consideration for historical window frames). Plywood can be treated with a fire-retardant material if needed. Plywood can encourage protestors to express themselves and dissuade protesters from defacing buildings and art.
 - b. Fencing or concrete barricades to limit access to the site.
 - c. Bright lights to discourage criminal activity, therefore creating a psychological barrier.
 - d. Increase perimeter patrols of museums or institutions.
2. **Pollutants:** There is the possibility that smoke bombs, pepper spray, fire smoke/soot, or tear gas* will be used near your institution. Prevent these pollutants from entering by:
 - a. Programming the HVAC system to recirculate indoor air only instead of pulling outside air or turn off system if not possible to change circulation. Bear in mind that decreasing building ventilation does increase COVID19 risk for staff in the building so onsite protocols may have to be changed for staff.
 - b. Ensuring that all doors and windows are closed with good seals, if unable to maintain a good seal, cover with plastic.
3. **Stabilization:** If objects are staying in place on exhibition or in storage, be sure to:
 - a. Cover objects with plastic sheeting if fire suppression system is at risk for activation due to smoke or fire damage.
 - b. Cover objects in Nomex or Tyvek** if your institution does not have a fire suppression system.
 - c. Place objects in museum-quality cabinets if available, then cover cabinets with plastic sheeting.
4. **Evacuation:** If needed, collection objects can be evacuated to a safe location. The evacuation location can be inside your own institution (interior, secure room) or at a cooperating institution.
 - a. Document and carefully pack all collections being evacuated.
 - b. Choose evacuation routes that are safe from protest activity.

- c. Ensure that at least 2 people are present for evacuation and transport in case of incidents.
5. Response: When reporting to your institution after an event, ensure it is safe to approach the scene and the situation.
 - a. Communicate! Make sure your team has already agreed on a response plan and which actions should be prioritize.
 - b. Arrive wearing appropriate closed-toe shoes, long sleeves, long pants, and have eye protection and respirator ready.
 - c. Bring documentation supplies to perform initial damage assessment and take photographs.
 - d. Do not go alone! Always have a buddy when arriving on scene. If you are arriving on scene, make sure you have alerted your supervisor, have proof that you are permitted to be on site, and have identification that you are museum staff.

*Tear gas, pepper spray, and fire smoke is highly toxic and if it does penetrate your institution wear appropriate safety equipment.

**Nomex is a fire-resistant material that can be ordered by the yard from limited vendors. Tyvek is water resistant, but not fire resistant, however it will not cause further damage if it catches on fire, like plastic sheeting. Plastic sheeting will melt during a fire and cause extensive damage.

Resources:

These resources will provide further information on protecting institutions during political unrest and compliment this document.

Preparedness for Civil Unrest, Performing Arts Preparedness:

<https://majesticcollaborations.com/2020/10/29/civil-unrest-preparedness/>

Protestor Rights, Tactics, and Countermeasures, International Foundation for Cultural Property Protection (webinar, registration open until December 2022):

<https://majesticcollaborations.com/2020/10/29/civil-unrest-preparedness/>

Emergency Evacuation of Heritage Collections, ICCROM: https://www.iccrom.org/wp-content/uploads/Endangered-Heritage_INTERACTIVE.pdf

Disclaimer: These are suggestions only. Guidance should also be sought from local law enforcement and emergency management agencies.