
ICOM Priority Tag for the Evacuation of Objects

To support **priority evacuation of objects from museum storage facilities**, ICOM Austria has developed a special tag to mark objects clearly and coherently that should be saved first from storage, making it easier for organizations and evacuation teams responding in crisis to find and rescue them in an emergency.

- ➔ **The tag marks objects in museum storage that should be evacuated as a priority.**
- ➔ The tag provides a uniform marking that is used in all museums in Austria, using the protected international Blue Shield distinctive emblem for heritage protection in armed conflict.
- ➔ The tag was developed in coordination with the Austrian Emergency-Platform, for Museums and Libraries and the Historical Monuments Office under the conditions of the Austrian Federal Fire Brigade Association and is easy to see thanks to its highly reflective surface.
- ➔ The Austrian fire brigade, armed forces and police forces are informed about the tag and use it in their training courses. We have performed exercises to strengthen experience and cooperation.
- ➔ We support other countries to adopt this system to help to save heritage objects in times of crisis or emergency. The design of the tag is provided free of copyright, but must be used in accordance with the rules on the following pages.

The following are some considerations when prioritizing collections:

- Collections on loan from other institutions or individuals
- Value to the region, state, or nation.
- Replicability/Irreplaceability (Can the object be replaced or is it unique?)
- Monetary value as a finite collection or as individual rare items.
- Value in supporting the mission of the institution.
- Importance as scholarly resource.
- Contributes to the breadth or depth of the collection.
- Fragility of the object – can it be transported? (e.g., film or magnetic tape or vellum; a film-based collection exposed to fire or high heat would be a low priority because most would be unsalvageable anyway)
- Type of disaster or duration
- Role in continuing or restoring institutional operations, (e.g., payroll, inventory etc.)

Finally, practical aspects must also be considered:

- **Can the selected objects be transported easily via escape and evacuation routes, through doors and up/down the stairs?**
- **Can the object be carried by a maximum of two people? -> So not too heavy or too big!**
- **How can the helpers quickly find the objects to be evacuated? -> Not too many objects should be marked, so helpers can concentrate on the most important ones.**

Further guidance on the emergency evacuation of collections can be found on the [Blue Shield International website](#).

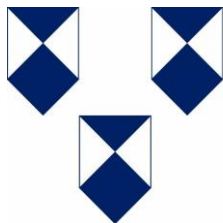
Use of the Blue Shield Emblem

The blue shield distinctive emblem is a protective symbol used during armed conflicts. Its use is regulated at all times by national law, international humanitarian law, and customary law, through the [1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict](#), and its Second Protocol of 1999.

The Convention identifies cultural property “of great importance” and “of very great importance” to be protected in the event of armed conflict and those responsible for protecting it.



A single blue shield is intended to facilitate recognition of protected cultural property during conflict to enable military responsibilities. Deciding this cultural property is a matter for the State Party and its competent authorities.



A blue shield repeated three times indicates cultural property under special protection. Special protection is requested by the state party and granted by the meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Convention.



The distinctive emblem with a red border indicates cultural property “of the greatest importance for humanity” under enhanced protection under the 1999 Second Protocol. Only cultural property which meets certain conditions set out in the Second Protocol may be identified by this symbol. Enhanced Protection can only be granted by the International Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict

Each type of distinctive emblem has specific military obligations under international law: failure to meet these obligations is a crime, and in some circumstances may be a war crime.

The Convention describes the logo and lays down conditions for its use. Misuse of protective emblems is restricted under international law. Misuse is defined as:

- **IMITATION** The use of a sign which, owing to its shape and/or colour, may be confused with one of the emblems. The criterion to decide whether a logo can be considered as an imitation of the emblem should be whether there is a risk of confusion in the public mind between the logo and the blue shield emblem, as it is precisely this confusion that the clause is intended to prevent.
- **IMPROPER USE** Any use of a distinctive emblem inconsistent with the relevant rules of international humanitarian law. The use of an emblem by unauthorized people or bodies or for purposes that are inconsistent with the fundamental principles of international law.

Please note: the risk of confusion should be considered regarding use of colours for distance viewing, in case of fading, when printing (e.g. black and white); in low light, and so on.

Cultural property that is protected and prioritised in a crisis or disaster is likely to be the same as cultural property prioritised during a conflict. This purpose is consistent with the fundamental principle of international law. HOWEVER, the blue shield emblem should only be used to identify cultural property that should be prioritised in crisis if:

1. The competent authority of the state party (e.g. state heritage agency) is involved.
2. The state party maintains a list of protected cultural property under the 1954 Hague Convention which should include any site or item marked with the blue shield and there is no danger of confusion with any other sites or objects.
3. It is accompanied by awareness raising to inform about the 1954 Hague Convention with civilians and armed forces so that there is no confusion in the event of an armed conflict.
4. Armed forces are aware of their legal responsibilities regarding the emblem.
5. There is no danger of causing confusion with the enhanced protection emblem.

The Convention forbids “use for any purpose whatever of a sign resembling the distinctive emblem” during armed conflict. If the emblem is used in peacetime for purposes such as education and awareness raising, it must not be used or displayed in any way that is likely to result in confusion regarding the protective purpose of the emblem for identifying immovable or movable cultural property; cultural property undergoing protected transportation; and/or the personnel engaged in the protection of cultural property.

- It must be comparatively small and may not be placed on armlets or the roofs of buildings.
- The emblem must not be displayed in a way that could inaccurately be perceived as affording protection to any object on which the emblem is displayed.

The emblems should not be used or displayed in any way that could damage its reputation and status as a protective emblem or dilute its meaning during armed conflict.

For more information see:

[Blue Shield: Emergency Management Resources for Cultural Heritage in Conflict, Disaster and Crisis](#)

[UNESCO and Blue Shield International: Distinctive marking of cultural property: rules and practices](#)

[Blue Shield International: The 1954 Hague Convention Blue Shield Emblems of Protection](#)