

**Conservation/Restoration Working Group**

# **Impact of the new Biocidal Product Regulation on museums**

## **Appeal**

Art and cultural artefacts of inestimable historical, artistic and monetary value are collected, studied and exhibited in German museums. A fundamental condition for the fulfilment of these tasks for society is the preservation of these collections. This includes preventative, conservation and restorative measures.

In recent years, the issue of pests in exhibition rooms, and in depositories and workshops, too, has become increasingly important for the museums. An increase in the numbers of insects and the presence of new species has been ascertained during the course of preventative monitoring. This involves setting up and regularly inspecting glue traps, or isolating suspect objects and putting them under observation in quarantine chambers. Many museums do not add objects to their depositories or exhibitions until they have been subjected to pest control in the form of an isolation process. Staff receive regular training to help them recognise and observe species of insects, and meetings and workshops support this activity.

Apart from the monitoring activities and the determination of the species involved, the question of which control methods to use is another burning issue. In decades past, pest control often involved the use of toxic substances whose effects on life and limb were known only to a limited extent. The use of such substances (arsenic, DDT, lindane, PCP etc.) – which are now banned in Germany – has turned the collections in our museums into hazardous goods. Many contaminated museum depositories can be accessed only by staff wearing protective clothing, and staff can work on objects only when considerable safety measures are in place. It was against this background that a search was undertaken for a reliable control method which could kill pests at all stages of development without producing any hazardous residues and without causing any damage to the museum exhibits – the solution was treatment with nitrogen. This procedure involves introducing the gas into closed rooms or tents by means of cylinders or after being produced by a generator. Museums sometimes have their own chambers for such treatments or outside companies install sealed tents on site. This so-called nitrogen treatment has thus proven to be a practical and economic method, also because it is suitable for objects of all type, size and form, and for all materials and combinations thereof.

The Biocidal Product Regulation (EU No. 528/2012) enacted in 2012 and implemented since September 2017 has now made it almost impossible for museums to use nitrogen for pest control. Nitrogen treatments which use nitrogen from cylinders can now only be carried out through a single specialist company. It is no longer legal for museums to use chambers which are supplied with nitrogen via generators. And it is now almost impossible to commission third-party companies, which have so far provided a very satisfactory service to the museums. Alternative methods can be discounted for a large proportion of the objects in collections, because heat or low-temperature treatment is risky and all other methods which use gases cannot be used on many materials without damaging them.

This letter is an appeal to the responsible authorities in Brussels to effect a new resolution which permits pest control with nitrogen – regardless of whether it is in cylinders or produced by means of generators. Only then will it be possible to continue to preserve our art and cultural heritage for our own and future generations and to combat the growing pest problem in a sustainable and inexpensive way which protects the environment and the objects, too.

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