

Bulletin 26: Treatment and Analysis of Archaeological Material

Updated October 18, 2023

This Bulletin replaces the version issued December 9, 2019

An important objective of archaeological investigations is to understand the context and association of materials with each other and *in situ* materials. Objects recovered from archaeological sites are the only remaining material evidence from past human activities. Material must be preserved as part of the archaeological record through appropriate means as necessary. Ultimately, cultural material must be stabilised to support delivery to a repository in the best possible condition and supports possible future analysis.

Bulletin 26 provides general guidelines for the field collection, initial inventory, and stabilization of cultural material and samples.

This bulletin is intended to address conservation methods only. Principles of this bulletin are also applicable to the handling of ancestral remains and grave goods, which may be subject to First Nations cultural protocols. In 2023, the Branch developed Bulletin 28 to provide wet site guidance regarding project planning, excavation, and interim and long-term storage.

Know your limitations and seek advice from specialists as appropriate.

This bulletin does not provide prescriptive direction but defines expectations on the outcome of the treatment of cultural materials under permits authorized by the *Heritage Conservation Act*.

Activities under consideration include:

- Excavation;
- Recording;
- Transport;
- Cleaning;
- Analysis; and
- Storage.

General principles of conservation:

- **Planning:** Anticipate potential cultural materials likely to be identified. Research conservation techniques prior to recovery and have a plan to deal with cultural materials.
- **Timeline:** Do not delay treatment; have a plan prior to recovery and implement as soon as required.
- **Extent of Conservation:** Use the simplest procedures with the least intervention to stabilise the material or answer the research question, only increasing as necessary.

- **Environment:** Consider environmental settings. For example, storage of organic materials for extended periods of time in humid conditions (*i.e.*, sealed containers) or saturated materials in dry conditions can result in adverse impacts.
- **Cleaning:** Consider an appropriate cleaning regime specific to materials on a case by case basis. Dirt may provide stability and protection. Conversely, handling, transporting, and storing dirty materials can have disastrous effects. Meanwhile, aggressive cleaning can remove residues and affect surface modifications.
- **Transportation and Security:** Receptacles and packing materials must maintain integrity of material during transportation and interim storage until final submission to the repository. Consider appropriate ventilation, temperature, saturation, and stability to minimise or avoid damage. Permanent storage must address protection and access to cultural materials. Sensitive items (*e.g.*, human remains) may require additional considerations and consultation.
- **Documentation:** Document all excavation and conservation procedures including application of labels, photographs, drawings, notes, and analyses for reports and submission to repositories.

The permit holder is responsible to ensure a specialist oversees osteological, lithic, and faunal analysis, and directs excavation of sensitive materials (*e.g.*, ancestral remains) or scientifically significant deposits (*e.g.*, wet sites, highly stratified features). A specialist can demonstrate work experience, specialised courses, or related learning opportunities, and has access to comparative collections, reference materials, mentors, and/or other qualified experts to support assessments.

Version Date	Noted changes
March 22, 2017	Creation of Bulletin
December 9, 2019	Clarifies how specialists can demonstrate their expertise Clarifies the intent of this Bulletin (<i>i.e.</i> , focus on conservation, not cultural protocols and indigenous knowledge)
October 18, 2023	Introduction to Bulletin 28 for additional wet site guidance