

Call for Action

Dear colleagues,

We would like to urge you to take action against the recent ban on the use of the so-called Nitrogen Fumigation Process for pest control on cultural heritage objects.

As you might have heard, the use of the nitrogen fumigation process (better named Anoxia process) for pest control is currently prohibited by an EU regulation (No. 528/2012). This means that the cultural heritage within the European Union is exposed to acute destruction by insects and (talking in monetary terms) endanger values in the millions, to say the least. Although some other methods for pest control exist, none of them is absolutely free of damage to the whole of materials our collections can consist of and nontoxic to people. Only Anoxia is the "one fits all" method and also because being nontoxic it is the method of choice in a lot of European countries and worldwide to control pests in museums, historic places, churches etc. For the arguments in favor of nitrogen, see also the detailed joint statement by ICOM and ICOMOS in the annex.

ICOM, ICOMOS, ECCO and a lot of other cultural heritage organizations now work to reverse the ban on nitrogen. A group of countries want to apply for an exemption in Brussels so that oxygen-free atmospheres can soon be used again for the protection of cultural property. It is expected that in September (18.-20.) such derogation rules will be discussed for the first time because they are new for the EU.

This is precisely where we need your help: Please use all your contacts with European colleagues to persuade them to contact their respective national authorities as soon as possible and ask them to take action in Brussels so that nitrogen can be re-admitted. If this happens before the meeting on 18-20 September, the derogation rule will hopefully be given more weight and may be better applicable.

The procedure could simply look like this:

1. Contact your national associations - restorers' associations and museum associations such as ICOM or other national and regional associations - to make them ask their national Competent Authority (see list in annex) to apply for the exemption and, above all, to generally withdraw the classification of nitrogen as a biocidal product.
2. Inform other cultural heritage professionals in your country (e.g. museum colleagues) and ask them to act and to disseminate the subject even further.
3. Contact the colleagues you know in other European countries and send them the attached PDFs. The best thing would be to address your colleagues personally and convince them to also act accordingly.

So far (only) Denmark, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Austria, Slovakia, Spain and the Czech Republic have declared (without obligation) that they wish to apply for such a derogation rule. It is therefore worthwhile to become active in all European countries so that this will actually happen and so that nitrogen (the Anoxia process) can be used again throughout Europe.

Together we can create a strong feedback to Brussels and actually make a difference to protect the European cultural heritage. If you have any further ideas on how the topic can be promoted, or if you have any questions, please contact the office of the Association of German Conservators (VDR).

Cord Brune, Speaker of the Working Group on Preventive Conservation (VDR)

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Attachments:

- Joint Statement by ICOM and ICOMOS [for dissemination to European colleagues]
- List of competent authorities by country [for dissemination to European colleagues]

Links:

<http://icom-oesterreich.at/news/icom-oesterreich-setzt-sich-fuer-eu-ausnahmeregelung-fuer-die-verwendung-von-stickstoff-museen> (Info on Austrian Application for derogation rule)

http://icom-oesterreich.at/sites/icom-oesterreich.at/files/attachments/icom-icomos_ue_no_528_2012_statement.pdf (The Joint Statement by ICOM/ICOMOS)