

## **Protection of Valuable Collections in Transit**

Valuable collections of any type, size, or value are most vulnerable when in transit, outside of collection storage, or away from protected exhibit spaces. The arrangements for shipping valuable collections is normally relegated to curatorial staff, registrars, or in some cases, directors.

While 99 times out of 100 there are no problems encountered, and no losses or damage experienced, it's that one time that makes the difference. "We've never had that kind of problem before" is not a valid excuse for leaving out professional protection planning. Where professional security management is available, they should be directly involved in the planning process. If no such assistance is immediately available, consideration should be given to the contracting of professional advice from recognized industry experts.

**The Plan.** The safety and security of artifacts in transit is at risk from the time they are removed from the security of collection storage, until the time they are placed in a secure storage area at the point of arrival. Before any collection item is removed from storage or exhibit space, a document authorizing its removal, signed by the person known to be in charge of the artifact, should be presented to the present custodian of its care. This paperwork should clearly describe the artifact, including its ownership and accession number, normal storage location, intended destination, manner of transportation, and person or persons responsible for its protection during transit.

Persons who may be in temporary custody of the artifact should be identified, and proof of completion of reasonable background checks provided to the owner. This should include drivers, escorts, other employees involved with the transfer of the artifact, and principals of the transport company.

Artifacts should be protected in suitable containers, secured with a high security lock. The exterior of the container should be identified by code numbers only, and not any other markings that would identify the contents of the container. No one on the shipper's staff should be made aware of the contents of any artifacts included in the shipment. Persons selected for escort duty or additional protection should undergo reasonable background checks.

The entire route of transit should be checked for areas of vulnerability to attack. Where unexpected delays, such as draw bridges, heavy traffic, road construction, or other impediments exist, consideration should be given to use of alternate routes. It is advisable to discuss route plans and travel times with local police. When possible, test runs should be made between the point of departure and arrival points.

Route security is a meticulously planned process which should be undertaken by professionals. Do not assume that transport companies, contract guard services, or in-house security details have any experience in this process.

At least three alternative routes should be selected. Routes should be thoroughly reviewed and clearly marked on current maps. Checkpoints along each route should be identified by code number or letter. Potential threats along each route should be identified. Selection of the final route should be made a short time before departure, with only trusted personnel informed of the selection. Drivers should be briefed just prior to departure.

Communications is an important aspect of shipment security. A primary and secondary means of communications, such as two-way radio and cell phone should be utilized. Each member of the transport team need to be briefed on communications protocols, codes, and identifying users. For critical shipments, consideration should be given to the use of a special frequency or radio channel, with a designated dispatcher for that activity alone.

Briefings should be conducted for each element of the transport team, to include drivers, escorts, dispatchers, law enforcement, contract security, in-house security, and collections management staff.

Just as museums are required to complete facilities security reports for borrowed or on-loan exhibits, similar reports are necessary to assure that the receiving end of art shipments is properly secured. The responsibility of the shipment team is not over until the shipment is safely stored at the receiving end and signed for by authorized receiving parties.