

## Results of enquiry about Preventive Conservation

When I shared my enquiry, I promised to share the results. We had 47 responses out of about 2000 views. This in and of itself can be interpreted as a manifestation of the pressure for time we find ourselves in. On the other hand, it might simply not be a very interesting enquiry. For those interested, here are the results. I could not resist from making some remarks which you will find directly under the question and result. To keep it interesting, and because nuances sometimes obscure the bigger picture, my reactions might be a bit bold. I am told that in real life I am more nuanced.

These results were also used in the seminar about Preventive Conservation ‘How do we maintain our management’ The report (NL, in Dutch) on this seminar can be found at : [https://object-care.be/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/2026\\_verslagSymposium.pdf](https://object-care.be/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/2026_verslagSymposium.pdf)  
I hope you will find this interesting. If you have questions and or reactions, please feel free to contact me at: [info@brugcon.com](mailto:info@brugcon.com).

### 1. How would you prioritise these aspects in Preventive Conservation



For myself education is the most important aspect of preventive conservation. Not only in workshops etc. but in day-to-day practises as well. The more people understand (not just have knowledge but really understand) the less likely they are to make crucial mistakes. Though every professional knows mistakes are somewhat inevitable and from these we also learn. So maybe sharing mistakes is even more important.

### 2. Physics are way more important in (Preventive) Conservation than chemistry

- True 25
- False 21



The use of 'way more' is an overstatement. However, I am convinced that physics are underestimated and underrepresented in educational curricula.

3. Preventive conservation is bigger than the collection management department



This turned out to be one of the main topics of the seminar. The conclusion we came to through the panel and audience discussions was that preventive conservation should have an organisation wide implementation. But it does need a central point (person) of coordination, communication, education, etc.

4. To become a good Preventive Conservation professional you need to understand objects.



This result does not need much reaction. Glad we (nearly) all agree it's all about Objects after all.

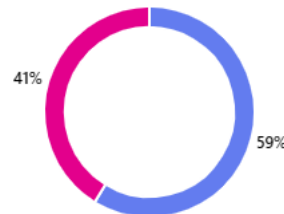
5. If you don't need to understand objects, what do you need?

1	To be effective on all levels you need to understand objects. However, that does not mean there are not meaningful aspects of preventive conservation that are above the object level.
2	
3	The materials that objects are made of and how they are held together and used [so - you need to understand objects]
4	Understanding of Pest, data analysis, BMS
5	A basic knowledge of how different materials react to their environment. A knowledge of an objects' inherent deterioration. Different material make-up will determine what pests are attracted to the object and how they are affected by pollutants. How composite objects or complex objects made of different materials can be stored best. Sorry read that question wrong. You definitely DO need to understand objects!
6	Proper framework and policies.

7	Understand object and not just that: global view, problem-solver, thinker out the box, multiscenario perspective, analytical view, keen eyed, social habilities and a little overthinker.
8	You have to understand the material properties (vulnerability), building techniques, the function/use of objects, degradation mechanisms, their values, the social context, the (preventive) conservation history, condition of objects in order to come to a rational, optimal PC decisions.
9	een good list of contact to help with quick and easy applicable answers
10	Open mind and care for objects.
11	education
12	environment understanding
13	Tijd en ruimte hebben om na te denken over de omgeving en mogelijke gevaren die daaraan gekoppeld zijn.
14	eye for detail, eye for potential risks, good communication with technical department and with museum strategy board
15	Communication skills, management skills, restoration background, team player, ability to put things in perspective, hands on person
16	You need to understand materials and how they react to environment Or you need to understand how to control an environment to gain certain conditions or you need to be able to handle / move objects without damaging them- requires and understanding of how objects are put together/materials - can be trained

6. You need to have a conservation background

● True 27  
● False 19



Conservation is a difficult term. In the terminology described in the CEN prEN 15898 standard it is defined as ‘measures and actions aimed at safeguarding **cultural heritage** while respecting its **significance**, including its accessibility to present and future generations’. Preventive conservation is described as ‘Measures and actions aimed at avoiding or minimizing future **damage**, deterioration and loss and, consequently, any invasive intervention’. As I have worked with CEN on these terms I am biased but still think these descriptions are valid. They are broad but so is our field of work.

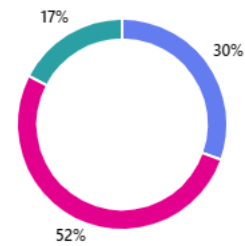
7. If you don't need a conservation background, what do you need?

ID	Responses
1	To be a preventive conservator you need a conservation background but to help with preventive conservation practices I think you need: attention to detail, an understanding of the collections care principles, willingness to learn, enthusiasm, adherence to the conservation standards of practice etc. Anyone can help point out environmental, display and collections care issues if they know and understand what they are looking for. Actual decision making, action taking etc should be left to someone with a conservation background.
2	I do not believe you need and objects/painting etc. conservation background, but you do need a background in conservation. I do not think coming from say an art history or curatorial position makes an effective preventive conservator.
3	
4	Experience working with collections and heritage institutions. It will need to do a lot of training and CPD to learn and understand how collections can get damage and what are the best strategies to mitigate damage.
5	training practice and supervision
6	Because applying preventive conservation is the responsibility of all Museum staff, they may need to understand the wider concept of preventive conservation
7	How do you define a conservation background? Do you need a conservation qualification to start doing preventive conservation? No. Do you need an appreciation of conservation ideals and techniques plus an understanding of materials science? Yes, absolutely. Can this be obtained other than via a degree? Yes.
8	Museum studies/science background
9	Materials science is a useful background.
10	Systems thinking, understanding of buildings and materials, risk management skills, practicality, good people skills, willingness to adapt
11	Critical thinking, framework and policies.
12	To understand objects, climate, en more; to new the basics of all the 10 agents of deterioration (according Robert Waller).
13	Practical methods in non-interventive uses/ in ways to care the objects. Indeed it is needed to have knowledge of housekeeping or dusting, handling, plans, materials, team management, environmental monitoring background, etc.
14	Be able to 'see' what an object needs, what is necessary
15	I think that the field of preventive conservation is a broad and non-monolithic field. So I think the answer is not simple. I think that it is desirable and beneficial for a person to have a conservation background, but that it is not always a necessity and that it depends on the context and specifics of the work that that person will perform within that specific position.
16	People with conservation background tend to know the objects better, their inherent properties, the connection between forms of deterioration and agents of deterioration.
17	You do need some form of education on the matter.
18	General understanding of the makeup of objects, climate and extending the shelf life thereof.
19	The ability to listen to those who do have this background, a good fine motoric ability, the ability to improvise and find creative solutions, the ability to communicate and knowledge of the risks for collections
20	Goede richtlijnen, inzicht in de 10 schadefactoren, een netwerk dat je kan invoeren bij (nieuwe) uitdagingen...
21	A critical mind and common sense.

ID	Responses
22	sense of reason and education
23	Learn to understand objects, materials, how they behave in different circumstances, observe, be organised, communication skills, passion for registration
24	Basiskennis van klimaat, IPM en vooral het herkennen van enkele schadebeelden die als alarmbel dienen.
25	insight in HVAC, chemistry and physics, history of arts (knowledge on materials, techniques and representation of themes and ideas)
26	The curiosity to learn about a variety of topics related to preventive conservation. It is not necessary to know everything, but it is important to understand where your knowledge ends and someone else can be of assistance.
27	Training and or materials engineering understanding of material decay and or environmental control expertise i.e. HVAC professional

8. Main purpose of Preventive Conservation is:

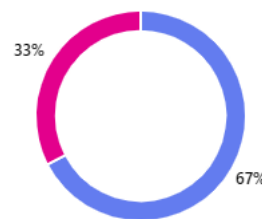
- To prolong/maximise the use of objects/collections 14
- To prevent damage to objects/collections 24
- To keep objects/collections as long as possible 8



Personally, I feel we should use our collections. If we do not (plan to) use them why keep them. Options two and three are too easy and miss the point. To prevent damage, just keep everybody away from the objects and to keep them as long as possible, just freeze them. 😊

9. Most damage is done on the workfloor

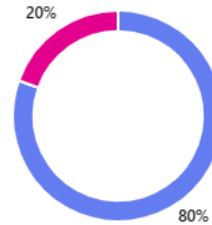
- True 31
- False 15



Again, a definition thing. I would go for true as everywhere people work with objects it is a 'work-floor'. Of course, disasters tend to create a huge amount of damage. Quite a large portion of this damage occurs afterwards though in too hurried handling which makes it work-floor related again.

10. Therefore education is Preventive Conservation's priority

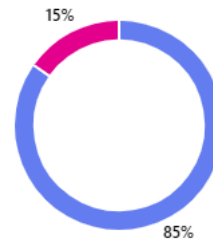
● True 37  
● False 9



My point of view is clear by now I hope. I am convinced that here, as in many other aspects, preventive conservation mirrors life in general.

11. Disaster recovery is about limitation of damage. This is part of Preventive Conservation.

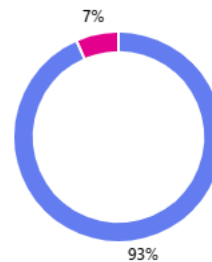
● True 39  
● False 7



In my opinion first response to disaster is Preventive Conservation. The goal is after all to prevent further damage to as many objects as possible. I know many conservators and my experience is that the more specialised they are the more likely it is that they fall in the trap of specialised care for individual objects, and tend to lose the 'bigger picture'.

12. To be able to educate you will have to have real experience in the field

● True 43  
● False 3



Practical experience is in my opinion crucial in educating preventive conservation. Citing theoretical information will never beat practical examples in explaining why things work or don't. To be able to translate what you know to what the participants will understand you need to have 'lived the experience'. At least most of it. Fine to see this is a shared opinion.