



What is the Blue Shield?

The Blue Shield is the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross. The name Blue Shield comes from the UNESCO 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, which specifies a blue shield as the symbol for marking protected cultural property.

Blue Shield is also the name of an international committee set up in 1996 to work to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by disasters of all types. The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) and its affiliated national committees (such as Blue Shield Australia) work together as the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross internationally.

ICBS brings together the knowledge, experience and international networks of the expert organisations dealing with cultural heritage: an unrivalled body of expertise which is available to advise and assist in responding to events such as the war in Iraq, the Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2004, and earthquake damage in Haiti and Chile. ICBS is international, independent and professional.

The ICBS was named in the Second Protocol of the Hague Convention (agreed in April 1999 by 84 countries) as a body advising UNESCO's inter-governmental Committee for Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

Blue Shield Australia is one of many national committees organised under the mission and objectives of the ICBS. BSA was established in 2005 with the approval and support of ICBS, as a federation of four non-governmental organisations (or 'pillars'), which represent professionals active in the fields of archives, libraries, monuments and sites, and museums. The BSA committee comprises representatives from the following Australian peak industry organisations:

- ICA: the International Council on Archives, represented in Australia by the *Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities*
- ICOM: the International Council of Museums, represented in Australia by *ICOM Australia*
- ICOMOS: International Council on Monuments and Sites, represented in Australia by *Australia ICOMOS*
- IFLA: the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, represented in Australia by the *Australian Library and Information Association*

These four organisations work together to prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergency situations in case of armed conflict or natural disasters that could affect Australia's cultural heritage. Representatives from these organisations on the BSA Committee include salaried professionals and independent consultants whose work for BSA is not directly remunerated and is frequently undertaken outside paid hours (i.e. voluntarily).

BSA aims to raise awareness of the value of Australian cultural heritage and the need for its protection against threats of all kinds. In order to achieve this aim, BSA organises an annual national campaign – May Day – which urges cultural heritage organisations around Australia to focus on disaster preparedness and response. This campaign on the 1st May each year, and throughout the remainder of the month of May encourages archives, galleries, libraries, museums, and cultural heritage sites across Australia to participate in at least one step to prepare for disaster preparedness and response.

For more information visit the Blue Shield Australia website at: <http://www.blueshieldaustralia.org.au> or visit us on Facebook. Contact us at info@blueshieldaustralia.org.au