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A Call to Action on MayDay

Australia's cultural treasures will receive special attention during May as the nation's archives, galleries, libraries, libraries, museums, heritage sites and organisations participate in the MayDay campaign.

The campaign, run by Blue Shield Australia, begins tomorrow throughout Australia and urges all cultural institutions to perform at least one disaster-preparedness task during the month of May.

Margaret Birtley, at the Secretariat of Blue Shield Australia, said: "Our cultural institutions hold the key to our past and present and it is critical that at least one month a year, we focus on disaster preparedness."

She said that while the recent bush fires and floods were extreme cases, they were a strong wake-up call to making sure that historic records, icons and the nation's treasures were protected from disaster.

"Australia's cultural heritage is always under threat from both 'man-made' and natural disasters," said Ms Birtley.

"Freak weather events test the ability of buildings to withstand the elements, and to protect the collections housed in them, while faulty electrical wiring in a neighbour's building may cause a fire that engulfs adjacent heritage buildings and significant collections."

Ms Sue Hutley, Chair of Blue Shield Australia, said the MayDay campaign was about cultural organisations taking responsibility for doing something simple to ensure the nation's memory stays intact.

"Don't be surprised to see firefighters and police in the local library or museum over the next four weeks; they will be there as part of the campaign to advise about safety and prevention in a bid to avoid unnecessary emergencies."

Originating in the United States in 2006, the MayDay concept is promoted in Australia by Blue Shield Australia.

During May, cultural heritage organisations will be carrying out a number of activities including:

- Updating or developing disaster plans;
- Identifying the three biggest risks to their collection or heritage site;
- Meeting with people working in the other local cultural organisations to find out how to share resources in the event of a disaster.

Blue Shield is the cultural equivalent of Red Cross, and works to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by wars and natural disasters.

The Collections Council of Australia serves as the Secretariat for Blue Shield Australia. The Collections Council is Australia's national peak body representing the shared interests of archives, galleries, libraries and museums. The organisation was initiated and is supported by the Cultural Ministers Council.

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