



## Additional Responses to the GAO Report on Smithsonian Facilities

### Security

The GAO reported a decline in the number of security guards over the past few years, which is accurate. The Smithsonian is taking steps (listed below) to improve the situation although the root cause of the problem is a lack of sufficient funding. Nonetheless, the Smithsonian has had an outstanding safety and security record. Specifically, three concerns were mentioned in the report:

Vandalism—Even one instance of vandalism, especially to a work of art, is too much. However, the 35 reports of vandalism in the past 2.5 years is a record any museum would be proud of—35 incidents; 19 museums in Washington, D.C., and New York City with more than a million artifacts and art works on display for some 23 million visitors, 364 days a year. The rate of vandalism, therefore, is extremely low.

Thefts—Two thefts of artifacts in the collections (including the fossils that were reported by GAO) between January 2006 and the present. We have a total of 137 million objects in the collections and more than one million on display at any one time.

Gallery closures due to lack of security guards—There was one instance in 2006 when a gallery in an art museum closed because the director determined that there was an inadequate number of guards that day. To put this in perspective: this is one gallery, one day, out of hundreds of museum exhibition galleries that are open every day of the year except Dec. 25. Many art museums in the United States close galleries on a rotating basis during a particular day depending on the availability of security guards.

#### What are we doing about the shortage of security guards overall?

- Permanent job vacancy announcements for security guard applicants (openings 365 days a year)
- Continued use of gallery attendants (a program that began this past summer)
- A full risk assessment by security consultant will be conducted October 2007 to March 2008 to help us evaluate the appropriate number of guards needed per gallery
- The increased use of alarms in the museums supplements the work of security guards in many areas

### Maintenance

Leaks—All buildings have roof leaks at one time or another. The Smithsonian is responsible for 3.2 million-square-feet of roof and 11 million-square-feet of space in its buildings. Leaks are considered a top priority and get immediate attention—they are ranked first in the 4-level prioritization scheme of facilities maintenance needs.

Leaks in underground art museums—The incident referred to in the report occurred when a valve failed and water entered a storage room in the museum. The problem was quickly detected and fixed, and no damage occurred to any artifacts. The leaks in the roofs of the underground art museums have been fixed and the Institution will begin fixing the condensate

system in 2008.

NMAI Cultural Resources Center in Suitland, Md.—Problems with the complex layered roof began not long after the building opened. An engineering firm was hired in 2004 to find the source of leaks; the study was inconclusive. Repair work was done in 2005 and 2006. In mid-2007 a new contract was awarded to a construction company to replace part of the copper roof in the section directly above the collections. Protective measures, such as plastic sheeting noted in the GAO report, were put in place, but none of the Indian Museum collections were damaged.

The National Zoo—The sea lion pool continues to be a problem as stated in the GAO report, but we have made some progress. The upper pool (seal pool) leaks have been successfully repaired. The lower pool (sea lion pool) is still leaking. The current work involves draining the pool to repair the two drain/filtration sumps as well as repairing a broken four-inch drain line which may be part of the problem. The engineers cannot determine sources of all the leaks until the pool is drained and these two sumps are repaired.

**Two maintenance problems highlighted in the GAO report merit serious and immediate attention:**

Fire Protection at the National Zoo—The Zoo has spent \$2 million on fire protection system in the past few years and has an additional \$6.3 million in the FY 2008 appropriation request to correct major deficiencies in detection and fire suppression systems. During 2008 and 2009, the Smithsonian plans to meet most code requirements in the Zoo buildings (to include housing the animals) which will include fire alarms, fire suppression systems (sprinklers), fire separation barriers and emergency lighting.

Electrical problems at the National Air and Space Museum—A project has begun using some of the funds allocated in the FY 2007 appropriation (\$1.5 million). The Smithsonian has requested an additional \$8.5 million in FY 2008 budget to complete the upgrade of the entire electrical distribution system at NASM. Over the past three years, the National Museum of the American Indian and the Air and Space Museum have had to close completely or open late twice because of electricity problems caused by PEPCO.

## **Funding**

Federal vs. private funding to pay for maintenance and capital repairs is the underlying theme of the GAO report. Members of Congress and GAO have suggested that the Institution is not doing enough to raise private funds to support its facilities. They have asked that the Smithsonian explore alternative methods to supplement the federal appropriation.

The Smithsonian is working very hard to raise private funds to be used in partnership with Federal funds to fix our facilities. Generally, the Institution uses federal funds to fix our infrastructure and private funds for the new construction, exhibitions, public programs and research.

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