

Standards for Archaeological Collections

Antonio J. Waring, Jr. Archaeological Laboratory

The following standards apply to archaeological collections curated at the Antonio J. Waring, Jr. Archaeological Laboratory (Waring Laboratory). Because the research value of a group of artifacts stems directly from the information contained in their associated records, artifacts and their associated records are jointly referred to as a "collection" in this document. These standards define the *minimum* level of documentation, cataloging, and processing required for curatorial purposes. Each collection is evaluated for curation on an individual basis. Special arrangements may be made for a collection comprised of multiple small projects. Archaeologists are encouraged to consult with the Laboratory Coordinator or Laboratory Director early in the planning stages of particular projects regarding processing issues and to resolve any questions regarding our curation of the collection. Archaeologists also should consult *Curation of Federally Owned and Administered Archeological Collections* (36 CFR 79) (www.cr.nps.gov/aad/36cfr79.htm) as well as the National Park Service's *Museum Handbook* (Part I, Museum Collections) (www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/handbook.html) and *Managing Archeological Collections: Technical Assistance* (www.cr.nps.gov/aad/collections/index.htm) for more information about the processing and management of archaeological collections.

Initial Procedure.

A *Request for Curation Form* must be completed to request curation of a collection at the Waring Laboratory. This form is used to identify contact information and any anticipated needs (including size) of the collection. A *Collection Summary Form* must be completed and submitted to the Waring Laboratory by the depositor at least one week prior to delivery of the collection. Each collection will undergo a complete condition analysis by the Waring Laboratory, including the completion of the *Intake Checklist* and a *Collection Inventory*, to evaluate the organization and state of the collection. The submitter and owner of the collection will be informed if the collection is found to deviate from our standards and present curatorial problems.

Collection Information and Catalog.

Collections submitted to the Waring Laboratory for curation must have a completed *Collection Summary Form*. This form is used to document collection ownership, collection type, collection contents, and the general condition of the collection. An *Abstract Statement* (200 words or less) that describes the collection and its continuing research value shall be provided by the Principal Investigator (or be otherwise professionally prepared) and included on the *Collection Summary Form* for each collection or its component parts (as appropriate). Any culled, missing, or loaned objects no longer present in the collection must be documented on this form.

Each collection must be accompanied by three copies of a clearly identified Artifact, Document, and Photo Catalog in archival printed form and on a PC formatted disk or CD in a Microsoft Excel or ASCII tab delimited format. The software name and version number must be labeled on the disk or CD. Three archival copies and one digital copy of the document catalog, photo catalog, and artifact catalog must be transmitted with the collection. The document catalog minimally must have a complete description, document creation date, and folder number. The photo catalog must include a unique photo identification number (field number if non-digital or file number if digital), date the photo was taken, provenience information (site, feature number, and/or location), description, photographer's name, camera used, project name, and format (i.e., tiff, 35mm). The type of artifact catalog used for the collection is at the discretion of the Principal Investigator; however, a clear explanation of the cataloging system used must accompany the collection. Regardless of the artifact catalog type, it must clearly reflect the organization of the artifacts with a unique catalog number for each catalog record and include a quantified count and weight, a descriptive inventory, associated provenience information, excavation date, and site number (if available). Counts are required for all material except crumbling bone, fractions, charcoal, and C-14 samples. Weights are recommended for all material except for C-14 samples. See the *Collection Labeling and Packaging Guide* for more detailed information.

Accession Numbers.

The Waring Laboratory, following its receipt and acceptance of the collection, assigns an Accession Number to each curated collection. This number supplements, but does not replace, catalog numbers used by the submitter of the collection.

Artifact Processing.

All artifacts must be clean and stable with no active signs of crumbling, rusting, or deterioration upon delivery to the Waring Laboratory, except in instances where cleaning would cause damage the artifact, where an unclean condition would facilitate a particular form of analysis, or where the submitter desires to contract with the Waring Laboratory to perform cleaning, conservation, labeling, packaging and other tasks. Items requiring specialized conservation measures or curation environments will be considered on a case-by-case basis and special arrangements must be made in advance with the Waring Laboratory. Microclimates are required for unstable metal. Artifacts and other collection components requiring special treatment must be packaged separately and identified on the [Collection Summary Form](#). See the [Collection Labeling and Packaging Guide](#) for more detailed information.

Diagnostic artifacts and a representative sample of non-diagnostics must be directly labeled with catalog numbers using archival quality methods, unless labeling methods would inhibit research or damage the artifact. Whatever the method chosen, it must be reversible in a non-water solvent (e.g., Acryloid B-72 in Acetone) and appropriate for the class of material. The direct labeling materials and methods must be identified on the [Collection Summary Form](#). See the [Collection Labeling and Packaging Guide](#) for more detailed information.

Documentation.

All original primary documentation associated with the collection must be submitted with the collection for curation. Primary documentation includes provenience information and all other records pertaining to the investigation that generated the collection, sufficient in scope and detail to facilitate continued research use of the collection. This documentation normally includes the, field notes and forms, photographic records, maps, plans and profiles, laboratory analysis records, written reports, official site forms, and project-specific proposals or contractual agreements. One additional archival copy of all primary documentation must accompany the collection. The scope of a given investigation will determine the nature and composition of the documentation and will prescribe their specific handling and treatment. If the collection is associated with a final project report, two archival copies plus one unbound camera-ready original of the final report on acid-free paper must be submitted with the collection. Supplementary information (i.e., CAD, GIS) may be submitted electronically. A printout on acid free paper must be provided of all information provided electronically. A statement describing the software along with the version used and disk content must be provided.

All photos need to be cataloged with a unique number. Non-digital photographic slides, prints, and negatives must be placed in archival polypropylene or polyethylene sleeves. The preferred format for digital photos is .tiff, which can be changed to be the default on most cameras. All digital photos must be printed both on a thumbnail contact sheet with the attached file name and in larger format no smaller than 3" x 5". Digital photos must be reviewed and nonessential photos culled. It is not necessary to document which photos were discarded. See the [Collection Labeling and Packaging Guide](#) for more detailed information.

Labeling and Packaging.

All artifacts and documents must be packaged in archivally stable, acid-free containers. Artifacts organized by provenience and separated by material class (pottery, glass, metal, etc.), or by more specific classification criteria, must be in a minimum 4-mil polypropylene or polyethylene resealable bags or small archival containers. Each container must be filled to no more than two-thirds of its capacity. The use of specialized containers or other measures needed to accommodate oversized objects or special samples should

be approved in advance by the Waring Laboratory. Corroding and/or crumbling unstable diagnostic metal artifacts must either be stabilized through electrolysis or placed in micro-environment. Documents must be placed in an archival box separate from the artifacts. An inventory of the contents of each archival box (including document boxes) must be completed and enclosed within the box. Each archival box must also have a temporary label taped on one outside end that contains basic information identifying the collection name, a summary of the box contents, and box number (e.g., Box 3 of 5). The standard box used for curation by the Waring Laboratory is a Hollinger® archival box (with a separate lid) measuring 15" x 12.5" x 10". The maximum allowable weight of each box and its contents is no more than thirty (30) pounds. The contents of each box (regardless of total weight) must be organized, not crushed, and packaged in a way that allows individual bags or documents to be easily removed and accurately replaced.

All artifacts must be organized within each archival box in sequential groups of catalog numbers. Larger containers of micro-climate metal, flotation, shell, soil, and matrix samples collected during a project may be boxed separately from the artifacts. Each bag or other container must be labeled with a permanent extra fine Sharpie® grade pen on the outside and have an archivally stable tag (such as 25% cotton and acid-free paper, or Tyvek®) enclosed in each package. See [*Collection Labeling and Packaging Guide*](#) for more detailed information.