

# **Catastrophic Floods in the Czech Republic in 2002**



## **Rescue Activities and Experience**

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# 1. Survey of Damage

- First half of August 2002
- Ten of the total number of fourteen administrative regions
- The material damage caused amounts to CZK 2,318,842,000 (USD 77,301,900)
- 25 museum institutions have been stricken by the floods
- The biggest ones include the central depositories of the National Museum, buildings of the National Gallery, the destroyed conservation department in Roztoky at Prague, the very valuable archive of the National Technical Museum and the Holocaust Monument in Terezín



## 2. Rescue Activities

Most of the collection objects in exhibition spaces and depositories could be evacuated in time to save them

The most important decision was the preparation of functional crisis plans according to which the respective administrators of individual objects proceeded and evacuated in due time the objects into previously selected reserve spaces

As regards the affected collection items made of paper, most of them were immediately put into deep freeze in cold storage plants, in order to prevent decomposition of material

Generally, it can be stated that rescue works proceeded with great intensity and they were very well organized thanks primarily to the institutions themselves.



### 3. Procedures and Activities of the Crisis Management Team

The Association of Museums and Galleries, the Department of Museums and Galleries of the Ministry of Culture and the National Museum have quickly established a coordination center which, in addition to information exchange, prepared a press conference and introduced a public money collection campaign in support of the museums and galleries affected.

As regards the crisis management, the concrete model situation can be described as follows:

- 1) **internal crisis center of the institution**
- 2) **crisis center of the Association of Museums and Galleries**
- 3) **working group of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic**
- 4) **inter-departmental commission of the government of the Czech Republic.**

## 4. Repair of Damage

- The greatest problem is posed by the damaged collections of archival material and books. The reason is that in addition to collections of the National Technical Museum the floods damaged also collections of the same character in a number of other institutions – National Museum, Holocaust Monument in Terezín and the Museum of Central Bohemia in Roztoky.
- The process of rescue of damaged documents and collections will take a long time and it will be very demanding as regards the finances and personnel. Various techniques and procedures will have to be used. Of the methods that were used I would like to mention vacuum drying or drying based on the method used for wood. Most of the institutions are currently carrying out continuous restoring of their collections, which should be completed in 2005.



# 5. Experience of the Institutions

- Of basic importance are good-quality crisis plans of the institution. They must include responsibilities of individual persons, actions and procedures of the crisis center, definition of risks, procedures in crisis situations, and also the question of emergency depositories and back-up documentation.
- A great asset are advantageous insurance terms, but after the experience from the floods it will probably not be simple to get them for cases of floods.
- Further, it is necessary to organize proper functioning of information exchange within the institution and also to local and state authorities as well as to other partners in crisis situations (hygiene, security, health care).

# 6. Experience of State Authorities

- On the basis of experience from the floods, the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic has prepared the analysis of risks of museum institutions, according to which the risk prevention will be taken into account in the programs of financial appropriations by the state.
- In conclusion, I would like to mention one minor experience that seemingly stands in no connections with problems of crisis situations. This is the very urgent need to inform the general public and to explain the problems and procedures how to solve them. Such communication with general public is necessary for taking the required steps as well as for getting the needed support.

