



## In Brief

### Audit of Physical Security and Inventory Control Measures to Safeguard the National Collections at the National Museum of Natural History Report Number A-05-06, September 29, 2006

#### Why We Did This Audit

This is the third of three reports covering security issues at the Smithsonian. We initiated this audit because prior OIG and Office of Policy and Analysis studies have shown that the Smithsonian's collections are increasingly at risk of theft or loss. Our objectives were to determine whether (1) physical security is adequate to safeguard the collections, and (2) inventory controls are in place and working adequately.

#### What We Recommended

We made 11 recommendations to strengthen physical security and inventory controls at NMNH.

We recommended that the Office of Protection Services prioritize and schedule the repair and replacement of security devices in NMNH collections storage areas; conduct a security assessment at MSC; and stress requirements for in-person security officer response to alarms. We also recommended that the Director of NMNH implement controls over keys and non-staff access to collections areas; finalize the museum's Collections Management and Inventory Policies; conduct a complete inventory of all gems and minerals; require specific inventory goals in management performance plans; and develop a plan to convert all inventory records to electronic records.

Management concurred with our findings and will implement responsive actions.

#### What We Found

Physical security, access, and inventory controls should be strengthened to reduce the risk of theft, loss, or damage to NMNH's collections. In particular, although security was adequate in some departments, several areas need improvement:

- **Missing or Inoperative security devices** Missing or inoperative security devices could allow non-staff access to the collections. We noted improperly secured doors; missing and inoperable card access readers; areas without alarms or with non-functioning alarms; unlocked cabinets; and an insufficient number of cameras or other devices to monitor individuals working in high-value collections areas.
- **Unlocked storage and poorly controlled keys** A significant portion of NMNH's collections were stored in unlocked cabinets or in locked cabinets in storage areas where the keys were poorly controlled. NMNH lacked a policy governing the use of keys and, in some departments, there were little or no controls over keys.
- **Inadequate interior guard coverage and in-person response to alarms** Security officer coverage of the collections areas has been significantly reduced and officer physical response to alarms has been inadequate. OIG staff successfully entered collections storage areas, accessed collections, and exited through perimeter doors undetected. When alarms sounded, no security officers responded in person.
- **Inadequate supervision of non-staff in collections areas** Contractors, researchers, volunteers, maintenance staff and visitors were often left alone in collections areas without supervision. Unlike in other museums' collection areas, visitors' and employees' bags were not screened.
- **Inventory policies, plans, controls, and records were inadequate or nonexistent** These weaknesses make it difficult to account for items and their location, thereby increasing the risk of loss or theft, and mean that collections may not be readily accessible to researchers, educators, and other users.

Management cited staff shortages and budget constraints as the primary reasons for the problems we identified.

For additional information, contact the Office of the Inspector General at (202) 275-2244.