



Biohazard Abatement: National Cathedral Vandalism

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- In late summer 2013, the Children's Chapel and Bethlehem Chapel at the Washington National Cathedral in D.C. had been vandalized with a green paint mixed with human excrement.
- A number of sculptures in the Children's chapels were vandalized, in addition to areas of the stone altar and floors.
- The Bethlehem Chapel had been similarly defaced with large amounts of thickened paint, notably at the organ: on the galvanized mettal organ pipes; ivory keys; and bench.
- Numerous books, the slate tile floors, and quarter-sawn oak paneling with hand-carved details were also damaged.



The organ in the Bethlehem Chapel was defaced with green alkylid paint mixed with human excrement.



On Left: Areas of drying paint were cleaned using mixtures of gels and acetone.



On Right: Areas of fecal matter were soaked in a poultice of distilled water and igeal before being removed.

- Our conservation team arrived within two hours of the initial call from the Director of Preservation and Facilities at the National Cathedral.
- In consultation with the Smithsonian Institution's Analytical Conservation Lab, the green paint was determined to be alkylid based.
- The first step in managing the vandalism to all affected surface areas was to first carefully remove the thickened wet paint with wood spatulas, disposing of the toxic waste in plastic bags.

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The organ during cleaning.



Several of the statues in the Children's Chapel were covered with human excrement and alkylid paints.



- The surfaces were then cleaned with cotton swabs saturated first with mineral spirits and then a proprietary mix of gels and acetone; this treatment was the most effective.
- In areas where paint had already started to dry, stronger solvents of acetone were required to remove the dried paint and biological residue.
- Areas of thick fecal matter not mixed with the paint had started to dry by the time our team had arrived on the scene; wooden spatulas were effective in the removal of dried fecal matter after the areas were allowed to sit for an hour in a poultice of distilled water and igeal.