

Herbarium's annual wrap-up

Readers may be familiar with the work of famous artist Christo who wrapped the Sydney headlands in kilometres of parachute silk.

Less widely known are the feverish activities at CALM's Herbarium each December when staff make a fine art of wrapping computers, photocopiers, microscopes, chairs, telephones, etcetera.

Why would Herbarium staff do this?

The short answer is 'fumigation'.

Western Australia's botanical collection, comprising some 450 000 specimens housed at CALM's Herbarium, has an estimated replacement cost of about \$26 million.

To protect this collection it is necessary to fumigate the building against insects such as drugstore and museum beetles.

Infestation by these

by Suzanne Curry

storage beetles can do irreparable damage to the specimens in a very short time.

In protecting the botanical specimens, however, it is necessary to protect staff and other fumigant-sensitive items - hence the wrap-up.

Each December, nearly two days are spent by staff in preparation for fumigation.

Over the past three years Co-Operative Bulk Handling Ltd has been responsible for this task, which has become imperative for the preservation of our botanical heritage.

The challenge after fumigation is to ensure that reinfestation does not occur and the Herbarium has introduced a list of quarantine procedures, copies of which are available from the receptionist at the front

counter of the Herbarium.

The procedures include: visitors wishing to use the Reference Herbarium must microwave their specimens on entering the building; specimens that have not been fumigated, microwaved, or deep frozen are not to be carried through the building from the entrance foyer to the basement; all entry to the building is through the front foyer, after signing the visitors' book and gaining permission from the receptionist to enter the building; visitors wishing to use the driers and other facilities located in the 'dirty room' should contact technical officer Phil Spencer beforehand on (09) 334 0491.

Adherence to these quarantine procedures in conjunction with the annual fumigation will ensure the successful protection and preservation of the State's botanical collection.



One of many normally busy work stations wrapped up and ready to go - nowhere.

Photo by Suzanne Curry