



NATHPO

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TRIBAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICERS

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How to Respond to Looting and Damage to Archaeological Sites

If You Find It, Record It, And Report It – Do not intrude into the area, investigate, or interpret what is there.

This could be a crime scene. Promptly report all potential violations to your local law enforcement agency. It is crucial that you report your information as soon as possible to get an investigation started and to preserve evidence.

It would be helpful to also notify the land owner or land management agency that is responsible for the land as well. Land managers, archaeologists and investigators are trained to focus on finding out the circumstances of any natural or human-made damage. We do not want to somehow impede that process.

Assume all potential violations are serious. Non-Law enforcement people should not initiate contact with potential looters. After/while notifying law enforcement and if you can do it safely from a distance, observe the activity, document what you see and photograph what you see if possible.

What happens now?

In an ideal situation, a law enforcement officer and an archaeologist would respond to the area to initiate the investigation. If there are people present, the law enforcement officer should observe and document his observations before he decides to approach them. The law enforcement officer is the person who is trained to make the potentially dangerous contacts.

After the contact has been made and the situation is no longer potentially dangerous, or if there are no people present, the law enforcement officer and the archaeologist will begin their initial investigation and conduct an assessment of the damage to the site. This should take place as soon as possible to prevent the loss of potential evidence.

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NATHPO is a not-for-profit membership association of tribal governments that are committed to preserving, rejuvenating, and improving the status of tribal cultures and cultural practices by supporting Native languages, arts, dances, music, oral traditions, cultural properties, tribal museums, tribal cultural centers, and tribal libraries.