Excavating an archaeological site is an unavoidably destructive process. Archaeologists mitigate this destruction through the use of careful excavation techniques, documentation, preservation, and reporting procedures that have been developed over the past century, and are updated as new technologies become available. Procedures include documenting exactly what was done in the field; analyzing and describing in detail all that was found that might be pertinent to a wide range of questions regarding human and environmental history; obtaining and analyzing samples of material relevant to those questions (for example, soils, pollen, micro faunal remains, and charcoal or other organic materials); comprehensively documenting, describing, and analyzing of all recovered artifacts; developing a catalogue of artifacts and other material taken from the site; preparing field notes each day that include photographs and drawings; treating all materials taken for storage and placing them in an environmentally controlled facility; and writing a report that describes all the above activities and provides an interpretation of what was found in the context of current research questions and interests. Further, anyone excavating archaeological sites has an ethical responsibility to engage with all interested and affected parties, in particular local communities.

To excavate a site without following such protocols is unmitigated destruction of the archaeological record, and with it, all of the information that might have been gained from that record about human history and the changing relationships among human groups and the environment. Such questions have never been more important as we move into a future in which human alteration of the environment and social change continues to accelerate enormously.

In certain countries, notably the United States (with the exceptions of a few states), the legal structure is such that property owners have the right to engage in undertakings that disturb or destroy archaeological sites, or to allow others, including non-archaeologists, to excavate archaeological sites on their property. In such countries, it is crucial to inform the public about how proper archaeological research is conducted, why it is undertaken, and what this research has revealed that might be of interest to them. In most countries, however, archaeological sites cannot be disturbed without a license, and sometimes they are not even considered private property. In such countries, broadcasting programs that depict excavation for pleasure or profit can only encourage illegal activity. For these reasons, we, the undersigned, call upon the media to refrain from broadcasting any program that presents in a favorable manner excavation of archaeological materials in any way that does not adhere to the excavation protocols outlined in the first paragraph above, which conform to standard archaeological practice around the world. Further, we note that, if appropriately produced, archaeology- and heritage-related programs in the media can be effective tools that provide the public with knowledge that is satisfying on a personal level and useful to all of us as we plot our course through a globalized and rapidly changing world.

Signatories:
Australian Archaeological Association
Canadian Archaeological Association
European Association of Archaeologists
ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management (ICAHM)
Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association
Pan African Archaeological Association
World Archaeological Congress