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Preservation and Conservation for Libraries and Archives

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DISASTER PLANNING AND RESPONSE

Making plans for responding to emergencies is preservation at the most basic level, yet it is often overlooked in favor of the day-to-day activities of a library or archive. While this book is not primarily concerned with disaster planning, a few aspects of the topic will be discussed briefly. (For more information, see the bibliography.)

There are three main parts to planning for emergencies.

- The *first* is to make provisions for the safety of patrons and staff.
- The *second* has to do with maintaining the institution's ability to continue functioning during and after a major emergency.
- The *third* is making provisions to reduce damage to the collections. This includes developing priorities for salvaging materials.

Fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, acts of terrorism, etc., can cause great devastation. Often the damage is not limited to the institution but affects a whole region. When a major disaster occurs, the *number one priority* is to get everyone out of the building and to account for every person.

Evacuation of Patrons and Staff

Most public institutions have evacuation plans. These include the appointment of fire marshals among the staff, directions for evacuating the building, floor plans posted in various locations on each floor, phone lists indicating the appropriate person(s) to be notified in case of emergency, fire drills, and other procedures. If there is no evacuation plan, this is the first place to start, and without any delay.

Contingency Arrangements during an Emergency

After instructions for the evacuation of patrons and staff are in place, the institution should make contingency plans for continuing to function during the restoration of the building(s). This involves arranging for temporary office space, computers, storage areas, and sometimes additional staff. The head of the library must understand what insurance will cover. This is also a good time to make sure that there is a clear chain of command in the institution so that, in the event of a major salvage operation, needless time will not be wasted in obtaining approvals.

Collection Priorities

Assess the collections and develop priorities for salvage so that emergency workers can be directed effectively. The importance of the materials to the collection affects this decision. The nature of the materials must also be considered. For instance: can the items survive prolonged immersion or wetting? When books printed on coated paper get wet, they cannot be allowed to dry closed because the pages may fuse together. This is called "blocking" and is *not* reversible. If a library has a collection of such books and this collection is one of its important holdings, those books should be among the first to be salvaged. The same applies to collections of photographs since most types of photographic materials cannot survive prolonged soaking.

The cost and availability of replacements enter into the equation. Is it possible to replace a certain book, and at what cost, or is it a unique artifact, valuable in its original form? An accurate inventory makes it easier to determine priorities for salvage.

Mercifully, most crises are not in the major disaster category, and much of the effort can be directed at preserving the collections affected. The most common emergencies are related to water coming into the building, either as flooding from ground level or as roof or pipe leaks. In addition, small fires, quickly put out, often involve a fair amount of water damage. These events usually come without warning. But some emergencies can be predicted and prevented or made less severe by a study of the building and its surroundings.

General Assessment or Survey

A general preservation survey has several goals. One of them is to assess factors that pose a risk to the preservation of the collections.

The survey can be conducted by one or more staff members who should take some time to explore the building. It is easy to take many things for granted when a person has worked in a building for a long time. During the assessment, however, the surveyor should look at it with a fresh eye in order to assess risks.

Consult the building engineer or head of maintenance for information on building details. Note environmental conditions in all areas. Observe what type of storage furniture is used for various materials. Determine the

locations of key collections. (Templates are available to help institutions compile surveys.)

Sometimes an outside contractor is hired to compile the general assessment or survey. A permanent staff member, who is part of the disaster planning team, should meet and work regularly with this consultant. The more involved the regular staff can be in the survey, the more they will learn from the consultant and the more pertinent the report will be.

The survey may uncover risks that can be corrected, thus preventing some emergencies. And it will be a logical first step toward emergency planning: forewarned is forearmed.

Compile a Disaster Plan

Compiling a disaster response plan is a lengthy process and requires a person (or team) who is persistent, detail-oriented, and patient enough to keep working on a project that does not seem to have much immediate relevance to the functioning of the library.

In some cases, an outside consultant is brought in to compile the disaster plan. This is helpful in cases where there are severe staff limitations; in addition, a person familiar with the process can bring in good ideas gleaned from previous experience. However, the consultant should work closely with one or more permanent staff members who will continue to be involved with the plan by updating it periodically and explaining it to other staff members. Otherwise, it is possible to end up with an excellent plan that nobody in the institution understands very well (or has actually read).

Calling Chains

Among the things that need to be established by the disaster plan is who must be called in various types of emergencies. This should include 911, the head of the department, security, maintenance staff, the head of the response team, and so on. The creation of a calling chain or telephone tree should be the first task of the disaster planning team.

Response Team

A response (or disaster action) team typically includes the chief administrator or director, the head of security, the building engineer or equivalent, the research librarian, archivist, or other person in charge of collection development, and the head of technical services or registrar. The list will vary depending on the institution, but

the object is to have people who can fulfill a variety of duties. Remember to include additional staff who could substitute for response team members away on vacation or who work only part-time. The person (or persons) who compiled the plan may be part of the response team, but this is not always the case.

Some larger libraries have a preservation librarian. This person's job often includes performing or supervising surveys and creating a disaster plan; the preservation librarian would logically be on the disaster response team and is sometimes the head of the team.

The chief administrator or director can play a variety of roles during a disaster but is not generally the head of the team. The director should be somewhat detached from the actual mud and debris so that he or she can continue to function as the chief administrator. The director will authorize procedures and expenditures and provide cash or a credit card for necessary purchases. The director (or his administrative staff) will contact insurance companies to find out exactly how the library is covered in this case; contact salvage companies; and provide news releases to the media.

Keep in mind that the head of the response team should be a person with stamina and good people skills who can function well under stress. It does not need to be a high-ranking officer. The director and the head of the response team should be able to communicate comfortably with each other.

The other members of the disaster action team will be in charge of actually implementing the actions needed to respond to the emergency.

These suggestions apply to larger institutions. A smaller library or historical society might not have people in all these positions, nor would it need a large disaster response team. One or two dedicated persons are sufficient; it is simply necessary to have the cooperation of the head of the institution and of the chief financial officer (the person who authorizes expenditures).

Members of the response team should each be assigned specific roles to avoid duplication of some steps and neglect of others. All team members should be very familiar with the disaster plan and with the response techniques outlined in it. They can, in turn, train other staff members or volunteers as the need arises.

If the library or archive shares a building with other tenants, or other branches of a larger institution, the person writing the disaster plan should cooperate as much as possible with the other tenants or departments for the

greatest common benefit. Conversely, the plan must include any off-site locations used for collections storage.

Emergency Instructions

Early in the planning stages, develop a set of very simple directions that can fit on one page. This form can be included in the written plan; multiple copies can be printed and posted near the evacuation instructions and at the entrance to all collection areas. A sample of instructions used at the LuEsther T. Mertz Library of the New York Botanical Garden is shown, with permission, on p. 15. This form gives directions for taking care of relatively minor emergencies. It assumes that certain supplies are on hand.

Emergency Supplies

Having some essential supplies ready can mean the difference between a minor emergency and extensive damage. The salvage kit should contain a copy of the disaster manual. The supplies can be kept in one or more convenient locations. Some items (e.g., flashlights, scissors, tapes) are extremely tempting to borrowers, so there should be an inventory from time to time to make sure everything is available and in working order. Many institutions keep the supplies lashed to hand trucks: this makes it easy to transport them to the scene, and it also provides hand trucks to assist in removing materials from the disaster area. Book trucks are another good option.

The kit should contain plastic sheeting. Order enough to cover priority collections. Precut to suitable sizes, refold, and label the bundles so they can be taken immediately to the appropriate areas.

Other useful items to have on hand include plastic or rubber gloves and boots, cartons, plastic crates, newsprint, paper towels, mops, buckets, and plastic garbage bags (fig. 1-10). Wet/dry vacuums are very useful for removing small amounts of standing water.

More complete lists can be found in various works cited in the bibliography. Many items can be purchased by the institution's central purchasing department, at great savings.

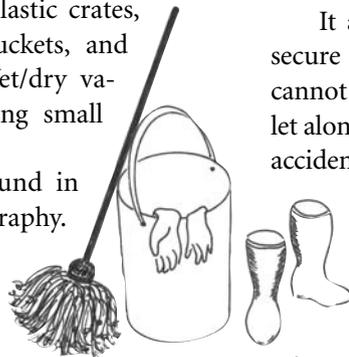


Fig. 1-10

Recovery Plans

Arrange for off-site locations where materials can be taken while the building is being restored. The disaster plan should also have information about local resources

needed to cope with various types of emergencies. Include cleaning services as well as more specialized vendors, such as dehumidification companies.

Compile a list of volunteers or other possible helpers from the community or other departments. Trusted former employees and current volunteers are also good sources of temporary assistance. Make contacts among sister institutions to secure mutual aid agreements.

Distribute the Disaster Plan

The disaster plan should be distributed to all departments in the institution, to fire and police personnel, and to others who have agreed to help in emergencies, such as volunteers and staff of nearby institutions. Alarm codes, the location of certain valuable collections, and other sensitive information should be blanked out from versions that go outside the institution. Key staff and disaster response team members must have copies of the plan at home in the event that no one can enter the building to get an on-site copy.

Construction and Renovations

A significant number of disasters happen during construction and renovation projects. Fires can start from electrical and mechanical equipment brought in by the contractor, or from a cigarette. The roof or walls might be open for a time, and windows and doors may not close well, allowing water and air pollution to enter the building. If the construction takes place in the summer, there is an increased risk of mold outbreaks. With winter projects, the threat of pipes freezing and bursting is a real concern.

It also becomes more difficult to keep the building secure when outside contractors come and go. Staff cannot always do their own work efficiently at these times, let alone be on the lookout for doors or windows left open accidentally. And a stranger in the building during the renovation project might not arouse much concern.

Collections and storage spaces should get more frequent security inspections, and there should be a heightened awareness throughout the building. Security staff may need to be increased temporarily. During construction, the collaboration of security staff and building maintenance workers is essential for keeping the collections safe. Perhaps the building engineer can serve as liaison between the construction crew and the institution's staff.

***Sample* EMERGENCY INSTRUCTIONS Form**

adapted from the
Disaster Preparedness and Recovery Plan,
the LuEsther T. Mertz Library of
the New York Botanical Garden

DO NOT PANIC

FIRE

1. Pull fire alarm
2. Evacuate the Building
3. Call 911 (dial 9 for an outside line)
4. Call NYBG Security 000 000-0000; after 4 P.M., call 000 000-0000

WATER

1. Call NYBG Security 000 000-0000; after 4 P.M., call 000 000-0000
2. Call Physical Plant (Name of contact person) 000 000-0000
3. Call Maintenance (Plumber) 000 000-0000
4. If problem persists, call Dept. of Water 000 000-0000 (dial 9 for an outside line)
5. Protect the area getting wet

A. Water from above

1. Remove library materials from shelves and move to dry area. Use book trucks if possible; otherwise hand carry materials to dry location.

AND/OR

2. Cover immediate and adjacent areas with plastic sheeting (use plastic sheeting located in box at the _____ Bldg. side of each collection floor)

B. Water from below

1. Remove library materials from lower shelves first; use book trucks if possible; otherwise, hand carry materials to dry location. When this is complete and if problem persists, remove all materials from shelves.

CALL THE DISASTER ACTION TEAM