Writing the Disaster Response Plan: Going Beyond Shouting "Help! Help!"

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Librarians don't like to think about disasters damaging books and library materials. But a look at the library literature reveals a long list of disasters affecting libraries. These disasters include fires, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, and workplace violence. Any of these disasters has the potential to harm the library's collections, the building, the library employees, and the library users. In addition to potential damage, the disaster may disrupt the services that the library offers to its users. Having a disaster response plan in place before a disaster strikes can help the library minimize the impact of a disaster and restore collections and services in an optimum time.

A library disaster is a threat that might cause harm to the library collection, building, staff, or users, or it is an unscheduled disruption of normal library services.

Library disasters may be dramatic:

- Fire
- Flood
- Earthquake
- Tornado
- Hurricane
- Bomb threat
- Civil disturbance or riot
- Work-place violence
- Hostage situation

Any of these disasters has the potential for damage to the library building and collections, or could result in a disruption of services.

Some disasters, while less dramatic than the previous list, are equally threatening to the library collection, staff, and users:

- High temperatures

- High or low humidity
- Mold and mildew
- Pests
- Asbestos

These disasters, although subtle, still require valuable time and attention of the library administrators and staff. In addition, remedying these disasters can require considerable monetary resources from the library.

The disaster response plan is a document that describes the steps a library takes to prepare for and prevent a disaster and, should a disaster occur, the procedures the library will follow to respond to the disaster and recover from it.

In this paper, we will look at the following topics:

- Objectives and Purpose of the Disaster Response Plan
- Disaster Response Plan
- Disaster Response Team
- Emergency Instructions
- Priorities for Salvaging Materials
- Contents of the Disaster Response Closet
- Disaster Response Reports
- Special Problems during a Disaster
- Format of the Disaster Response Plan

On the 1999 Biennial Survey of Depository Libraries, we were asked to respond to Question 11: Does the library have a disaster response plan in which the Federal depository collection is included? Of responding libraries, 57% answered Yes, 43% answered No.

Objectives and Purpose of the Disaster Response Plan

In writing a disaster response plan, it is important to keep in mind several objectives for the finished plan:

- To anticipate possible disaster and introduce measures to reduce the effects should a disaster occur
- To ensure that library staff are informed and trained in disaster procedures
- To ensure that trained professionals frequently inspect the building
- To ensure that disaster response procedures are well planned
- To ensure that disaster supplies and equipment are on hand or readily available
- To establish priorities to determine the order in which items are rescued and recovered
- To establish contact with contractors and consultants who specialize in disaster response
- To ensure that normal conditions and services are re-established as soon as possible after a disaster
- To ensure that the library introduces feed-back mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of the disaster response plan

A library disaster can occur at any time of day or night. Thus, it is impossible to know in advance who will discover a disaster. It may be a custodian, a security person, a stack page, or a librarian. You should compile a disaster response plan that provides useful information to the first person on the scene regardless of the person's expertise. The disaster response plan should:

- Outline initial action to be taken in event of a disaster
- Outline long-term steps to complete a recovery effort
- Provide contacts with personnel essential to a successful recovery

During any emergency or disaster, the protection and safety of human life must be the unquestioned first priority of all persons involved with the salvage effort. Do not enter, or allow others to enter, a damaged or flooded area until officials declare it safe. All library staff and volunteers who assist in a salvage effort should understand that they should never risk their own safety to protect or rescue library materials. A human life, unlike books and materials, cannot be replaced.

Disaster Response Plan

The process of writing the disaster response plan consists of four steps:

- Survey the library building and grounds
- Outline the disaster response plan
- Write the plan
- Revise, revise, revise

Begin the writing process with a survey of the library building and grounds. Monitor indoor air quality for temperature, humidity, mold, and mildew. Monitor the collections and building for pests. Look for potential hazards both inside and outside the building. Clean up potential trouble spots such as obstructions near exits or old paint cans stored in mechanical rooms. Outside the building, look for tree limbs that overhang the building or clogged drains on the roof or in the parking lot.

After a survey of the building and grounds, outline the disaster response plan. Involve library administrators, librarians, and support staff in the process because any disaster in the library will somehow affect all these groups. Everyone working in the library needs to have an investment in the disaster response plan. Identify the disaster response team, and assign duties to the team members. Determine the priorities for rescuing and salvaging library materials. Anticipate disasters that affect either small or large areas of the library, or that affect the community as a whole such as tornado, earthquake, or hurricane. During a major disaster affecting the entire community, where will the library turn for resources? Plan for damage to computers and electrical equipment. Establish a communications policy that identifies the library's official spokesperson as well as an official communications outlet. Contact suppliers, contractors, and consultants who specialize in disaster response to identify the services that meet the library's needs and budget.

If you have done a good job in surveying the facilities and outlining the disaster response plan, writing the plan will be easy. Compile a phone tree of the disaster response team.

Compile the list of priorities for rescue and salvage. Compile a list of suppliers, contractors, and consultants with which the library will do business. Finally, write down all steps the library will take to recovery from a disaster.

Revising the disaster response plan is an ongoing, never-ending process. To be effective, the disaster response plan must be current and accurate. You should review the disaster response plan at least once each year and revise as needed.

Disaster Response Team

An essential part of an effective response is a good disaster response team. The disaster response team is an on-going group who work constantly on identifying contractors and consultants, refining recovery priorities, and developing recovery techniques. Because of the members' work in advance of a disaster, the team is ready to swing into action when a disaster occurs. Each team member has a specific role to play. A disaster response team might include the following members:

- Team Leader
- Recovery Specialist
- Crew Manager
- Supplies and Transportation Manager
- Recorder
- Photographer
- Communications Manager
- Keeper of the Disaster Response Plan
- Others as needed

The Team Leader manages any recovery and salvage operation and coordinates recovery activities. After consulting with other members of the team, the Team Leader determines the level of response based on established priorities and the scope of the disaster. The Team Leader handles publicity and public relations such as requesting volunteers.

The Recovery Specialist stays current on recovery procedures by reading the literature and attending conferences and meetings. With the knowledge gained through these experiences, the Recovery Specialist develops specific recovery procedures for the library. By training library staff and volunteers, the Recovery Specialist ensures that appropriate recovery and salvage procedures are followed.

The Crew Manager assembles and coordinates work crews of library staff and volunteers. In addition, the Crew Manager controls the flow of materials into and out of the recovery center. Because breaks, food, and refreshments can help improve the morale of work crews, the Crew Manager arranges for these amenities. After a disaster, the Crew Manager should recognize volunteers who help in a recovery project.

The Supplies and Transportation Manager, working with the Recovery Specialist, determines the supplies that the library needs to keep on hand for immediate response in the event of a disaster. As the person in charge of the disaster response closet, the Supplies and Transportation Manager issues supplies to work crews. In addition, the

Supplies and Transportation Manager arranges transportation of library materials that are sent to commercial salvage companies.

The Recorder maintains the list of priorities for recovery. This list is also included in the copies of the disaster response plan. The Recorder tracks damaged materials sent from the library building. In addition, the Recorder corrects the library's holding records when material is discarded.

The Photographer helps document a disaster and subsequent recovery effort by photographing or video-taping the damage to the building, collections, and furniture. It is important that the Photographer keep a careful record of the date and time of the photos or videos. When a damaged area is declared safe to enter, the Photographer should photograph or video an area before any clean up work is done as well as after an area is cleaned.

The Communications Manager operates the library communications center and handles incoming and outgoing calls.

The Keeper of the Disaster Response Plan, working with other members of the disaster response team, coordinates all activities concerning the disaster response plan. As the principal writer of the disaster response plan, the Keeper revises pages or sections as needed. The master copy of the disaster response plan is held by the Keeper. At least once each year, the Keeper asks all members of the disaster response team to bring in their copies of the plan for review and revision.

In the course of writing a disaster response plan, the library staff may decide that they want or need other team members. Positions should be created and duties assigned as needed.

Emergency Instructions

All library personnel should have a copy of emergency instructions that cover severe weather, earthquake, fire, flood, bomb threat, and work-place violence. The emergency instructions should include evacuation procedures. In the event of evacuation from the building, the library should have a designated gathering point for all library personnel. At the designated gathering point, officials can take a head count to determine if all employees got out successfully. In addition to evacuation from the building, the emergency instructions should include information on evacuation to a designated emergency shelter.

Priorities for Salvaging Materials

It is essential that the library administrators and staff agree in advance on the priorities for salvage. Because mold and mildew growth may begin within 48 hours of materials getting wet, the library must know in advance which materials will be salvaged and which will not. The larger the scale of the disaster, the more important the priorities become. In establishing priorities, the library administration and staff must think of the library as a whole, not just in terms of a unit or a department. The priorities are important in the aftermath of a disaster to help everyone to work together on the recovery effort.

Several questions are important in determining priorities for salvage:

- Is the material critical for the ongoing operation of the library?
- Is the material available in another format or another nearby collection?
- Would replacement cost more or less than restoration?
- Is the piece rare or important to the library's collection?
- Does the piece require immediate attention (clay-coated paper, vellum, or water-soluble ink)?

When establishing priorities for salvage, there are some suggested categories of material to consider:

- First priority. These are the materials judged essential to the library operation. Examples could include

  - Unique office files including personnel files, financial records, and insurance policies. Before establishing this material as a first priority, determine if some or all of the material is duplicated in a central file for the city, county, or campus. You may find that portions of these files are duplicated and thus could be easily reconstructed. If so, that portion of the office file would be a lower priority.

  - Irreplaceable items such as unique books and manuscripts.

  - Record copy of theses and dissertations. For decades, many academic libraries have microfilmed theses and dissertations. Some libraries are now digitizing them. Whether film or digital, it is a good idea to store a copy outside the library building.

- Second priority

  - Rare books - Microform master copies.

The library can establish as many levels of priority as are judged necessary to the library's operation.

Contents of the Disaster Response Closet

To respond effectively to a disaster, the library should keep essential supplies on hand. Although it is not necessary to keep these supplies in a closet, some level of security is important to keep materials from getting used in everyday operations. The Supplies and Transportation Manager controls the disaster response closet and issues materials as needed. Keys to the disaster response closet should be readily accessible at all times, even when the library is closed. A list of materials to have on hand in case of emergency includes:

- Wet-dry shop vac
- Dehumidifier
- Electric fans
- Heavy-duty, grounded extension cords

- Plastic sheeting to drape book stacks and furniture to protect them from a ceiling leak
- Unprinted newsprint to cover work tables to protect them from water stains
- Freezer wrap for covering wet materials going to a commercial restoration firm
- Waxed paper to interleave books with clay-coated pages
- Latex or rubber gloves
- Small plastic buckets
- Paper towels and sponges
- Masking tape and duct tape
- Scissors
- CAUTION: DO NOT ENTER tape and signs
- Monofilament line (fishing line) to hang signs
- Dust masks
- Rescubes® and plastic milk crates for moving wet materials
- Cleaning products and disinfectants

Disaster Response Reports

After each disaster, regardless of how minor, an appropriate individual, usually the librarian responsible for the area where the disaster occurred, should write a disaster response report summarizing the incident. Because the disaster response report will create institutional memory about the disaster, you should write the report for the librarians who will work in the building five to ten years in the future. To record the incident fully, the disaster response report should include:

- The date and time of the disaster
- The area of the library affected by the disaster
- A description of the disaster
- An approximate number of pieces affected
- The immediate response taken
- The long-term actions taken
- The amount of time rescuers spent on the recovery operation (person hours)
- The results or impact of the disaster
- A description and number of pieces discarded, if any
- The financial impact of the disaster including human resources, supplies, replacement materials
- The photographs or videos made by the Photographer

The person writing the disaster response report should send copies of it to each of the following files or individuals:

- Library department or unit files
- Appropriate library administrator
- Keeper of the Disaster Response Plan

The library administrators and the disaster response team should review the disaster response reports annually to identify trends and to determine the costs of disasters. By

analyzing the disaster response reports, the library administration can establish maintenance priorities for the library building and grounds.

Special Problems during a Disaster

There are special problems that need particular attention during the response to a disaster:

- Mold and mildew. The spores of some molds and mildews are toxic to humans, causing flu-like symptoms and even death. Anyone with asthma, mold allergies, chronic respiratory disease, or a compromised immune system should not enter an area until it is clean, dry, and tested for molds and mildew.

- Asbestos in the building creates problems. While dry flakes of asbestos can be cleaned from books, there is no recognized way to salvage books and library materials that are wet with water contaminated with asbestos.

- Electric equipment and computers that have been wet should be treated carefully. Because of potential shock hazards, a professional electrician should check all circuits and equipment before the electricity is turned on.

Format of the Disaster Response Plan

Consider creating two versions of the disaster response plan: a master copy and working copies. The master copy, which should be held by the Keeper of the Disaster Response Plan, includes features that are not in the working copies. These additional features could include a purpose statement, the disaster response reports, and the revision table. By contrast, the working copies, which are distributed to the disaster response team and to public service points in the library, are stripped-down versions of the master copy and are utilitarian. They have no material that does not directly address disaster response. The working copies have no introduction, no purpose statement, and no disaster response reports.

The format of the disaster response plan can help users understand instructions and take proper action. Make the plan easy to use. If the plan is hard to use, people won't use it. Don't make responders wade through verbiage to find information. In formatting the plan, consider how it will be used. The person using the disaster response plan is facing a disaster and will probably be under some stress. The plan will probably have few prose paragraphs. Instead it will consist primarily of lists, tables, charts, and floor plans.

The writing style should be clear, concise, and consistent. Be certain the reader can understand the instructions you have written. If possible, test the instructions on library staff and others to see if they can understand an instruction without additional information. If the test subjects have questions or do not understand an instruction, rewrite the instruction until the test subject understands it. Use the active voice and the imperative mood. Use precise room numbers and other locations. Avoid acronyms; the person using the response plan may not be familiar with library acronyms. Do not write an instruction that states "Go in the ILS office, and turn off the main switch." The responder may not know what ILS means or

where that office is located. Instead write an instruction with a precise room number: "Go in room 105, and turn off the main switch."

In addition to being clear, the disaster response plan should be concise. Don't use unnecessary words. There will be few adjectives in the disaster response plan. Be sure to include all relevant information without floundering in unnecessary details.

The final key is to be consistent both in word usage and page layout. By presenting the material in a consistent manner, you help the reader understand the instructions. Be consistent in the use of terms and titles. If you refer to the Government Documents Department in one sentence and in the next, refer to the Government Documents Unit, the reader may question if you are referring to the same entity. Eliminate potential confusion by consistent use of terms.

In addition to consistent use of terms, help the reader understand the instructions by using a consistent page design and layout. A consistent page layout gives the reader visual clues that help in understanding the information. Consider using a bold sans serif face (such as Arial Bold) for headers and a serif face (such as Times New Roman) for text. In addition to being consistent in the use of typefaces, be consistent in the layout of the page. Put the title and other information in the same place on each page. The reader can then anticipate where and how the instructions are presented. Use white space to guide the reader's attention to important information.

Make the plan easy to revise. If the plan is hard to revise, you won't revise it. Because the plan has to be current to be useful, the information in it should be revised as often as needed. In the next part of this paper is a list of sections that may be included in the disaster response plan. The plan will be easier to revise if each of these sections starts on a new page.

To make the plan both easy to use and revise, put the pages in plastic page protectors in a 3-ring binder. Use clear index tabs to indicate sections. Date and initial every revision, no matter how minor.

Suggested Outline for the Disaster Response Plan

At a minimum, a good disaster response plan will include the following sections:

- Emergency telephone numbers
- Disaster response team members and duties
- Emergency instructions
- Priorities for salvaging materials
- Recovery techniques and procedures for salvaging damaged books
- Inventory of the disaster response closet , location of keys to the disaster response closet
- Disaster response reports (master copy only)
- List of contractors and service providers who specialize in disaster recovery
- Resources such as large freezers
- Distribution of copies of the disaster response plan

- Revision table (master copy only).

Distribution of Copies

Distribute copies of the disaster response plan to appropriate people and offices:

- Provide members of the disaster response team with two copies: one to keep at work, the other to keep at home.
- Provide library administrators with two copies: one to keep at work, the other to keep at home.
- Provide all public service points in the library with one copy
- Provide library security with one copy
- Provide city or campus safety office with one copy
- Provide other concerned offices with one copy.

My daddy always said, "Hope for the best, but plan for the worse." If you are lucky, your library will never need to use the disaster response plan. If, on the other hand, your library does suffer a disaster, you will be ready with information that should help achieve the best possible outcome.

Selected Resources

Books

Alire, Camila, ed. Library Disaster Planning and Recovery Handbook. New York: Neal-Schuman, 2000.

Kahn, Mariam. Disaster Response and Planning for Libraries. Chicago: American Library Association, 1998.

Articles

Hobbs, Lenora. "Chaos Limitation: Emergency Response Plans." Public Libraries 30 (September/October 1999): 277.

Moore, Mary. "Attack of the Killer Mold Spores." American Libraries 30 (March 1999): 46-9.

Morgan, G. and J.G. Smith. "Disaster Management in Libraries: The Role of a Disaster Plan." South African Journal of Library and Information Science 65 (March 1997): 62-71.

Page, Julie A. "When Disaster Strikes: First Steps in Disaster Preparedness." The Serials Librarian 36 (1999): 347-61.

Schaefer, Mary Jo Jecklin. "An Ounce of Prevention: The Importance of a Written Disaster Plan." Texas Library Journal 71 (1995): 158-61.

Schink, Michael Lee. "Selecting Disaster Recovery Software." Colorado Libraries 25 (Spring 1999): 38-9.

Wettlaufer, Brian. "Preparing a Library Disaster Plan." Library Mosaics 5 (November/December 1995): 8-10.

Documents

Fox, Lisa L. Disaster Preparedness Workbook for U.S. Navy Libraries and Archives; prepared on behalf of the Northeast Document Conservation Center for the U.S. Naval War College Library. Newport, R.I.: The Library, 1998.

SuDocs: D 208.202:D 63

http://disaster.lib.msu.edu In left panel select Sample Plans, then select U.S. Navy Libraries and Archives Disaster Preparedness Workbook in either PDF or HTML version

Chart

Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel; produced by the National Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Property in cooperation with the National Task Force on Emergency Response. Washington, D.C.: The Institute, 1997.
http://www.heritagepreservation.org/PROGRAMS/Wheel1.htm

Internet sites (URLs checked on 21 September 2000)

Amigos Library Services, Inc. A Disaster Plan for Libraries and Archives, 2000:
http://www.amigos.org/disasterplan.pdf

Colorado Preservation Alliance. Disaster Recovery Plan.
http://felix.aclin.org/other/libraries/cpa/articles/disaster/disasterplan2.html

LALINC Task Force on Preservation and Disaster Planning.
http://www.latech.edu/disaster

SEFLIN Preservation and Conservation Committee. Disaster Plans on the Internet.
http://seflin.org/preserv Scroll down to Various Disaster Plans

SOLINET. Preservation Services.
http://www.solinet.net/presvtn/preshome.htm

Stanford University Libraries, Preservation Department. CoOL: Conservation OnLine: Resources for Conservation Professionals.
http://palimpsest.stanford.edu

Western New York Library Resources Council. Western New York Disaster Preparedness and Recovery Manual for Libraries and Archives.
http://www.wnylrc.org/pub/disman.htm