

## Disaster Preparedness

Disasters—natural and man-made—and weather patterns all have the potential to damage or destroy records. Basic precautions and the formation of a disaster plan will help prevent the unnecessary loss of valuable records in the instance of a disaster. Following these guidelines will minimize potential risks and reduce the loss of records.

## Disaster Prevention

Disaster Prevention refers to steps you can take within your organization to protect your building and collections before a disaster occurs.

- Establish security routines, including an annual building inspection and seasonal maintenance.
- Inspect wiring regularly.
- Inspect roofs and drains regularly.
- Follow local and state fire codes. The presence of fire alarms, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, and a sprinkler system are strongly recommended for personal safety and collection preservation. Map their locations.
- Select a storage space least vulnerable to fire, flood, and harsh weather patterns.
- Establish and practice fire evacuation and tornado response procedures. Map evacuation routes and designated tornado shelters.
- Install water detectors and alarms. Map their locations.
- Locate water pipes and water shut-off valves. Map their locations.
- Install alarms to prevent intrusion, deliberate, or random violence.
- Install emergency lighting.
- Store records at least 6 inches off the ground.
- Prohibit smoking in storage areas.
- Limit small appliances in the collection storage area.
- Limit unauthorized access to the storage area.
- Limit the number of records a patron may view at one time.
- Consider microfilming records that receive high use, and limit access to the originals that may be stored off-site.
- Check your insurance coverage before a disaster occurs.
- Determine how you will have access to emergency funds: a supply of purchase orders to be used only during an emergency, or a disaster emergency fund.
- Purchase emergency supplies to keep on hand, inventory them regularly, and map their locations.
- Train staff in salvage techniques.

- Label vital and historical records, and create an inventory or locator map that will allow you quick access to these records when needed. Regularly update your finding aids and keep copies off-site
- Buildings and collections are particularly vulnerable during periods of construction, so increase security during these times.
- Improving collection storage areas, when possible, will help prevent disasters and security problems.
- Keep duplicates of your disaster plan, policies, lists, and record inventories off-site.

## Disaster Plan

A Disaster Plan guides your organization through the proper responses to various types of disasters. This section highlights some of the elements of a disaster plan.

- Create a written disaster preparedness plan or policy, which includes disaster recovery, damage assessment, and post disaster evaluation procedures.
- Identify and prioritize the most important records. This includes records needed to resume business, historical records, and collections. Determine which record media and collections are more vulnerable or valuable than others.
- Analyze your building, site, and collection storage areas. Include building and site maps in your disaster plan.
- Establish responses to all potential geographic and climatic hazards, and other risks which could jeopardize your employees, building, and collections: tornadoes; floods; fires, which will include water damage from firehoses; pest infestation; mold; vandalism; and accidents.
- Contact local civil defense offices to understand their disaster response procedures.
- Identify sources of assistance, and develop contacts with appropriate consultants, suppliers, and vendors beforehand. Check your local Yellow Pages for contacts in your area, and make a list including names and telephone numbers. Update the list annually.
- Establish contact with a freezer service; verify contact annually.
- Special conservation efforts may be necessary with water or fire-damaged records, have phone numbers and addresses available of people or agencies to contact.
- Include a copy of your collection inventory and vital records locator map in your disaster plan.
- Include a supply list and locations in your disaster plan.
- Create a telephone tree of staff and volunteers to help in the event of a disaster.
- Establish a chain of command among staff members. All staff should know who they report to, and who they notify in case of disaster.
- Know what your insurance carrier will require as evidence of damage: photographs, written documentation.
- Establish salvage procedures for all collections, records, paper, and record media.
- The following section outlines the roles and responsibilities for a two-pronged approach to disaster response: damage assessment and damage recovery. When establishing assessment

and recovery teams for your disaster plan, it is important to detail specific responsibilities, outline clear lines of authority, and remember that a person may have more than one role.

- **Institutional Services Manager:** responsible for seeing that the building is safe, damage to the building is evaluated, and measures formulated and implemented to remedy or correct problems. Upon notification of a problem establishes that no threat exists to personnel safety, secures the affected area and/or building, and alerts Assessment Director. Establishes priorities for facility repairs, and follows the progress of repairs once begun.
- **Assessment Director:** organizes and manages the process by which damage is evaluated. Responsible for notifying and instructing Assessment Team Leaders, and enlisting the assistance of in-house or outside experts/resource people as required. Evaluates findings and recommendations, and contacts the Recovery Director with recovery recommendations.
- **Assessment Team Leader:** selects and assembles the teams members, and directs their operations. Instructs the team on what to do and how to do it, including methods of inspection and sampling, assessing damaged material, and documenting the process. Monitors the damage investigation, reporting recommendations to the Assessment Director.
- **Assessment Team:** consists of people most knowledgeable about the collection or material involved. Responsibilities include recording observations and decisions made by the team; photographing damage; investigating where damage exists, the type of damage, and the importance and significance of the affected material; estimating the extent of damage to the collection; and establishing initial priorities for recovery of damaged items.
- **Recovery Director:** organizes and manages the recovery process. Sets priorities based on information received from the Assessment Director, assigns recovery teams, reports on progress, actions taken, problems encountered, and future risks. In many cases, the Assessment Director and Recovery Director may be the same person.
- **Recovery Secretary:** keeps a record of all purchases and orders placed, assists in coordinating requests for materials, information, and other assistance. This position will require immediate access to a telephone.
- **Conservator:** works with the Recovery Director to advise on recovery priorities concerning collections and materials, recommends appropriate techniques and procedures. Assists in choosing and locating supplies, equipment, and services necessary for recovery. In many cases, the Conservator and Recovery Director may be the same person.
- **Recovery Team Leader:** appoints team members, instructs the team on what they will be doing and how they will do it. Monitors the recovery process, and updates the Recovery Director.
- **Recovery Team:** may include all staff members. Responsible for separating collections and other material to be salvaged, moving material to be recovered from affected areas to work or other storage spaces, drying materials, and packing materials that will require shipment to another facility. Other responsibilities include maintaining records and photographs of the recovery effort, including inventories and dates when items are sent out of the building to off-site storage or other facilities; what items have been frozen,

treated or dried; where items have been relocated; and items in need of additional attention. The Recovery Team may also label items that have lost inventory numbers, label or relabel boxes with locator information, and label boxes ready for shipment.

## Disaster Recovery

Disaster Recovery refers to the response and actions your organization takes after a disaster occurs.

- Always place human safety first.
- In the event of an emergency, prevent staff and volunteers from entering the building until city officials (fire or police department), or a building inspector determines the building is safe to enter.
- Allow only authorized staff and volunteers into the damaged area, use check-in/out sheets to monitor access.
- Contact your insurance carrier.
- Stabilize temperature and relative humidity.
- In the instance of a disaster, a recovery plan may include the following steps:
  - locate and establish a recovery site.
  - establish a designated storage area for removed material.
  - retrieve vital records.
  - maintain building security.
  - set up systems necessary to continue operations, such as workspace for employees, telephones, financial services, clerical support, office supplies, equipment, food, drink, and restrooms.
  - plan for building repair, and the replacement of equipment and furnishings.
  - determine what has been lost and what records and collections are salvageable.
- The goal is to stabilize the collection until further conservation measures can be taken. This includes, when possible, removing collections from the damaged area, prioritizing the recovery effort, and beginning initial stabilization measures.
- Prioritize which records to conserve first, taking into consideration media type, duplication, and value to the organization.
- Conservation of record media may require special processes; please contact preservation personnel before acting.
- Quick reaction is a must. Mold can grow on records within 48 hours of damage. Immediately air dry or freeze wet records to prevent further damage and growth.
- Minimize damage to collection materials and records on the floor by re-routing traffic, or by creating a bridge over the items with boards and chairs.
- Assess the disaster response. Ask such questions as:
  - Could I limit or avoid the damage if a similar disaster struck again?
  - Do I need better insurance coverage?
  - Do I need to revise my records management program to minimize future losses?
  - Do I have the information and supplies I need to deal with future emergencies?

- What aspects of the Disaster Plan need to be modified?
- What additional training do I or my staff need?

## Resources

### **National Task Force on Emergency Response, *Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel***

Copies may be ordered by calling: 1-(800)-979-2233;

or by writing:

1730 K Street, NW, Suite 566

Washington, D.C. 20006

The *Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel* offers information on the steps to take during the first 48 hours after a disaster. Guidelines include the supplies needed, stabilizing the environment and collection, retrieval and salvaging, and damage assessment. The reverse side offers preservation steps for government records media, including electronic records, books, paper, and photographs.

## Web Resources

### **The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC)**

<<http://aic.stanford.edu/>>

The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works web site provides a link to disaster recovery. This page addresses initial disaster response steps, as well as salvaging water-damaged articles. The Salvage at a Glance chart offers handling, packing, and drying methods for most types of water damaged records and media.

### **Business Continuation Management (BCM)**

<<http://www.state.mn.us/portal/mn/jsp/content.do?agency=OETweb&id=-536890274&programid=536909923>>

The web page of Business Continuation Management (BCM), a unit of the Minnesota Department of Administration InterTechnologies Bureau, offers emergency response tips, and provides links to disaster web sites and vendors.

### **Conservation OnLine (CoOL), Disaster Preparedness and Response**

<<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/bytopic/disasters/>>

The Conservation OnLine, Disaster Preparedness and Response web page offers links to documents and reports on disaster preparedness, links to disaster preparedness sites and disaster plans, as well as disaster and emergency resources.

### **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)**

<<http://www.fema.gov>>

The Federal Emergency Management Agency web site provides information on disaster preparedness, disaster assistance, and mitigation. Also available are emergency response action steps for the first 48 hours after a disaster has struck, and specific provisions to take during natural and technological disasters, which may be helpful when creating a disaster plan.

### **Harvard University Libraries, Preservation**

<<http://preserve.harvard.edu/resources/disaster/index.html>>

The web site for preservation information and resources for libraries at Harvard offers Resources for Disaster Preparedness and Recovery. This page provides resources such as Disaster Recovery: a Checklist for First Response, a link to Disaster Supplies and Services, and Essential Elements of a Disaster Plan.

### **Lower Hudson Conference, Emergency Planning and Recovery Techniques**

<<http://www.lowerhudsonconference.org/EMPART/index.html>>

The "Lower Hudson Conference of Historical Agencies & Museums is a regional service agency providing professional training, networking and technical assistance support to museums, historical societies, archives and libraries in the Hudson Valley." They have made this handbook available, believing the best time to prepare for a possible disaster is during the peace and quiet of an average workday. The Emergency Planning and Recovery Techniques handbook provides information on disaster prevention, planning, response, recovery, equipment, and vendors.

### **Michigan Alliance for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage**

<<http://www.dia.org/mi-alliance/disaster/index.html>>

The Michigan Alliance for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage is a statewide organization composed of libraries, archives, museums, historical societies, and preservation networks, with the purpose of promoting the continued availability of Michigan's cultural resources for the enjoyment, education, and benefit of present and future generations. The web site links to Disaster Preparedness Planning addressing items to incorporate into a disaster plan.

### **Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), Conservation of Collections, Emergency Response**

<<http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/emergency.html>>

The Minnesota Historical Society, Conservation Department, Emergency Response web site provides recommendations for saving damaged family collectibles, paper, books, photographs, textiles, and ceramic, wood or metal items, and numerous other materials, as well as providing links to other web sites specializing in disaster recovery and response.

### **National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Preservation**

<<http://www.archives.gov/preservation/index.html>>

The link to Technical Information on the National Archives and Records Administration, Archives and Preservation web page includes a section on Disaster Preparedness and Response. Available are *A Primer on Disaster Preparedness, Management and Response: Paper-Based Materials* <<http://www.nara.gov/arch/techinfo/preserva/primer/eng1234.html>>, and *Salvage Operations for Water Damaged Collections* <<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/waac/wn/wn10/wn10-2/wn10-202.html>>.

### **NARA, Records Management**

<[http://www.archives.gov/records\\_management/index.html](http://www.archives.gov/records_management/index.html)>

Available under Policy and Guidance, Records Management Publications, is *Vital Records and Records Disaster Mitigation and Recovery* <[http://www.archives.gov/records\\_management/publications/vital\\_records.html](http://www.archives.gov/records_management/publications/vital_records.html)>. This document provides guidance on how to manage vital records throughout their life cycle, protect them from loss in a disaster, and assist in recovery should a disaster occur. Particularly valuable are the Disaster Planning Steps, Elements of a Disaster Recovery Plan, the sample plan, and Self-Evaluation Guide.

### **New York University, Disaster Plan Workbook**

<<http://www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/research/preserv/displan/toc.htm>>

The Disaster Plan Workbook provided by New York University's Bobst Library walks you through a framework of a disaster plan, allowing you to fill in the information pertinent to your organization.

### **Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC)**

<<http://www.nedcc.org/>>

The Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) provides disaster assistance through its emergency assistance program. Also available on the NEDCC web site is the print publication *Preservation of Library and Archival Materials: A Manual* <<http://www.nedcc.org/resources/print.php>>, as is an online version called Preservation Leaflets <<http://www.nedcc.org/resources/leaflets.list.php>>, which is organized by topic and was revised and updated in March 2007. These leaflets provide information on Disaster Planning, a worksheet for outlining a disaster plan, and emergency salvage of wet materials.

### **Records and Information Management Resource List**

<<http://home.flash.net/~survivor/websites.htm>>

This web page offers links to Records and Information Management (RIM) and other related web sites. The link to Disaster Management and Recovery will link you to 155 other web sites on this topic.



**Solinet**

<<http://www.solinet.net>>

The Southeastern Library Network, Inc. is a not-for-profit library cooperative providing resource sharing for the educational, cultural, and economic advancement of the southeastern United States. Through the links to Preservation Services, Preservation Leaflets, there is access to Preservation Resources on the Internet: Disaster Preparedness and Recovery, Disaster Recovery Services and Supplies, and several other disaster handouts.

**South Carolina Archives and History Center, Services to State and Local Governments**

<<http://arm.scdah.sc.gov/>>

The South Carolina Archives and History Center offers *Disaster Preparedness and Recovery in State Agency and Local Government Offices* <<http://www.state.sc.us/scdah/16.pdf>>, public records information leaflet no. 16, for download. Included in the leaflet are disaster preparation and recovery recommendations, as well as a checklist for disaster preparedness and recovery, and a supply list.