

Spring 2018

Preservation Perspectives: The Disaster Plan

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Repository Citation

Stolz, B. (2018). Preservation Perspectives: The Disaster Plan. *Kentucky Libraries*, 82 (1), 16-16.
https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/ul_pub/207

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PRESERVATION PERSPECTIVES: "THE DISASTER PLAN"

BY BILL STOLZ, ARCHIVIST, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVES, WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

The winter and spring of 2018 certainly delivered a reminder to librarians and archivists about potential weather related disasters in the workplace, and within our home collections. My last column focused on practical tips to prepare for and handle emergencies. Now we will focus on creating a disaster plan. If your institution does not have a plan in place, or if the plan has not been updated in three or more years, this is an excellent time to get to work.

When creating a plan, consider the size of the facility, collections, and staff. This is a living document, so change and adapt whenever you think it necessary. Make sure all staff have read the plan, know where disaster supplies are stored, and, most importantly, know where safe areas are within and around the building, in case disaster strikes during work hours.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN WRITING THE PLAN:

- Designate a disaster response point of contact. Depending on the size of your organization, this might be you, the director, or the branch manager. Someone must be available day or night.
- Create a phone tree for staff in case of the need to mobilize recovery assistance overnight or on a weekend.
- If you work in a large organization, create a disaster preparedness committee. Ask colleagues who have expertise, experience, and/or an interest.
- Consider all types of potential disasters: flooding, water leaks, fire, gas leak, and/or anything that could potentially damage your collections and facility.
- Think about the region/area where you work. Is it prone to flooding, wild fires, earthquakes, and so on? Then think about your facility and its characteristics, including its age, whether it has a history of leaky plumbing, and other infrastructure issues.
- In the modern age, we also need to consider other potential threats to the facility and personnel, such as an active shooter, a bomb threat, or violence. Incorporate each scenario into the final plan.
- Learn the location of all the shut-off valves (water, gas, electricity, HVAC) and utility rooms (boiler, servers, electrical) within the building. Make sure to include maps and diagrams, and train other staff.
- Create a list of local emergency response organizations, including utility and maintenance contacts. Update this list regularly.
- Talk to the local emergency response organizations (fire, police, and emergency management) and make them aware of your collections. These organizations may also offer practical information on disaster preparedness and training, including first aid.
- Compile a list of reputable vendors that can assist with disaster clean up and recovery.
- Identify high value items (intrinsic and/or monetary) and mark them so staff and emergency personnel know what to remove first from the building.
- Attend local, regional, and national workshops for the latest information.
- Create a library of up-to-date resources for staff to read.
- Create disaster kits and check/update safety items regularly, including batteries and first aid kits. Have at least one weather

radio and be sure to have flashlights stationed throughout your facility. You do not want to be caught without a flashlight in the storage area if there is a sudden power outage, so place flashlights in those potential dark spots within your facility.

- Have new staff members read the disaster plan and discuss the various aspects of the plan with them. Make sure all staff review the plan annually and share updates regularly.

When the disaster plan is complete, share it with staff and provide checklists at every service point. The checklists should be brief and include contact information (whom to call first) and bullet points on what to do.

There are many great resources available, both in print and digital form, to assist with disaster planning and emergencies. Also

look to your local, regional, and national organizations (Kentucky Library Association, Kentucky Council on Archives, Midwest Archives Conference, Society of American Archivists, and/or the American Library Association) for conference sessions and workshops.



REMEMBER:
**IT IS BETTER TO HAVE A
DETAILED PLAN AND
WELL-TRAINED STAFF AND
NEVER DEAL WITH A DISASTER,
THAN TO HAVE NO PLAN IN PLACE
AND RECEIVE A PHONE CALL
AT 3:00 A.M.**

RESOURCES:

- The Society of American Archivists (SAA) has created an [Annotated Resources](#) page with an extensive list of educational resources, disaster plan templates, primers, guides, and other information on disaster preparedness and recovery.

- The [American Institute for Conservation](#) (AIC) has various guides and resources available for disaster preparedness and emergencies. AIC also sponsors the [National Heritage Responders](#), which offers a 24/7 telephone hotline and possible on-site volunteer assistance.

- The Council of State Archivists (CoSA) has created a [Pocket Response Plan®](#) that can be downloaded and adapted for your facility.

- The American Library Association (ALA) has a [Disaster Preparedness](#) page with links and information.

- Consider adding books like Miriam B. Kahn's *Disaster Planning for Libraries*, 3rd Edition (Chicago: ALA, 2012) to your staff library.

Remember: it is better to have a detailed plan and well-trained staff and never deal with a disaster, than to have no plan in place and receive a phone call at 3:00 a.m.

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