

Disaster Plans: Hope for the Best, Plan for the Worst

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Slide 1

No comment.

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No comment.

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A good disaster response plan will be:

- Practical. The plan should include information that will be useful to those individuals responding to a disaster ("the responder"). The plan will tell them what actions to take first and who to contact immediately. The plan will exclude information that they do not need.
- Understandable. The information presented in the plan must be understandable. If the responders cannot understand the instructions, they cannot effectively respond to the disaster.
- Accessible. Copies of the disaster response plan must be easy to find. If the responders cannot find a copy of the plan, they cannot respond effectively.
- Current. The information and instructions in the plan must be current and accurately reflect the situation in the library building at the time of a disaster. If the instructions are not current, the responders cannot be effective.

The library's disaster response plan must pass this four-part test. If the library's current plan does

not pass the test, you need to write a new plan. If the library does not have a disaster response plan, keep these tests in mind as you write a plan.

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No comment.

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No comment.

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The library's disaster response plan will focus on library materials, equipment, and the building. However, the first priority in any emergency or disaster must be the protection and safety of human life and health. Always remember that people are more important than materials and equipment.

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Here is a suggested outline for a disaster response plan. You may find that your library's disaster response plan needs additional information beyond that suggested in this outline.

Slides 8 and 9

There are six steps in writing a disaster response plan. We will look at each step in detail.

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You know your library building and collections better than anyone else. Use your knowledge and experience as a starting point. Identify potential hazards both inside the building and outside.

Identify and mark those collections that will need special attention in the event of a disaster. Monitor the quality of the air in the library for temperature, humidity, mold, and mildew. Watch for pests in the building and collections.

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There are many information sources that you can use to identify the environmental hazards in your region. Two useful web sites are Federal Emergency Management Agency Disaster Map <<http://www.fema.gov/disasters/>> and the U.S. Geological Survey-National Seismic Hazard Mapping Project <<http://geohazrds.cr.usgs.gov/eq/genmap.html>>.

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There are a variety of threats to a library including natural, technical, and human threats. Identify the threats to your library.

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After identifying the threats for your library, rate the impact of each threat on the library's operations, collections, operations, and services.

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Then rate the probability of each threat.

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Then multiply the rating value of the impact by the rating value of the probability to obtain the weighted threat rating.

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The resulting matrix will help you establish priorities in writing the disaster response plan.

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The higher the weighted threat rating, the greater the impact of the disaster on your library. The library's disaster response plan should address the areas of greatest threat.

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Begin the writing process by outlining the disaster response plan. Create a disaster response team and assign responsibilities to each member. Determine the resources and collections in the library that will need priority attention in the event of a disaster. Plan for disasters of varying dimensions: small area (about 1000 books), large area (an entire floor of the library) and wide area (affecting the entire community as in a tornado, flood, or earthquake). During a wide area disaster with the resulting disruption of essential services, where will the library turn for resources?

When writing a disaster response plan for a library, you should involve library administrators, librarians, and support staff. Everyone working at the library needs to feel an investment in the success of the disaster response plan.

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Much of the writing process will involve compiling lists. Members of the disaster response team should work with library administrators to compile this information.

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Everyone who works in the library, including part-time employees, student assistants, stack pages, and security personnel, should be familiar with the basics of the disaster response plan:

- What a copy of the disaster response plan looks like

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- Where copies are located
- What immediate action to take if a disaster occurs • Where to find emergency supplies.

Review this information with the library staff at least once a year. If the library has a high turnover of employees, a more frequent review may be needed.

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To be effective, the library's disaster response plan must be current and accurate. Review the plan at least once each year to see if changes or additions are needed.

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To make the copies of the disaster response plan both easy to recognize and easy to revise, use 3-ring binders in a bright color. Plastic page protectors will keep the pages clean. In addition, the page protectors make it easier to keep the plan current; revised pages can be easily slipped into place. Use clear index tabs to mark sections of the plan.

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You should develop one master copy of the disaster response plan and as many working copies as needed.

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The master copy of the disaster response plan will include editorial apparatus such as a purpose statement and revision table. In addition, the master copy will include the disaster response reports written after each disaster. One person on the disaster response team, the keeper of the disaster response plan, will be in charge of updating and revising the plan.

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The working copies of the plan will be distributed to members of the disaster response team and key personnel in the library as well as service points in the building. Working copies are stripped

down versions of the plan without the editorial apparatus of the master copy.

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The information in the disaster response plan will be presented in lists (numbered lists for steps in a sequence or items listed in order of importance, bulleted for items of equal value or priority), tables, charts, diagrams, and floor plans.

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If the disaster response plan is hard to use or if information in the plan is poorly organized, the people responding to a disaster cannot use the plan effectively. Make the plan easy to use.

If the disaster response plan is hard to revise because of poor formatting, the keeper of the plan will avoid the chore of revising it. Make the plan easy to revise.

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A well-written disaster response plan will be clear, concise, and consistent. Let's look at each of these factors separately.

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An effective disaster response plan will be written in a manner that is clearly understood. Use simple, direct language and short sentences written in the active voice. Write the instructions in the imperative mood; do not be shy about telling the responders what to do. Avoid acronyms and library jargon.

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An effective disaster response plan will give the reader all the information that the responder needs to initiate action in an emergency without unnecessary or relevant information. Keeping the plan concise is not an easy task.

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Finally, an effective disaster response plan will be internally consistent in the use of terms, page layout, and typography. Although many of us were taught in English classes to avoid multiple usage of a term, consistent use of a term is more important than literary merit when writing a disaster response plan. Responders to a disaster must understand immediately the instructions in the plan. A responder should not have to ask "is the government documents department the same as the government information area?"

Along with the consistent use of terms, consistent page design and typography will help the responder understand the information and respond effectively to an emergency situation.

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After each disaster, write a report describing the disaster and the library's response to it. The disaster response report will create institutional memory about the disaster. File copies of the report with the library department or unit and the appropriate library administrator. In addition, put a copy of the report in the master copy of the library disaster response plan.

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The disaster response reports can be invaluable when determining the cost of disaster response. In addition, the reports can help administrators determine trends and establish priorities for repair and maintenance of the library's physical plant.

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See the Selected Resources list for additional resources on writing a disaster response plan <<http://library.csun.edu/mfinley/fdcread.html>>.