

B.13 Disaster planning

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B.13 Disaster planning#

After a fire destroyed Norwich Central Library in 1994, library managers realised that 'it could happen to them'. Disasters do happen and by nature they are unexpected. Disaster plans help you to react in the event of a disaster and to cope with the aftermath.

Why prepare a disaster plan?#

There are various hazards in all environments. Often they just seem to be minor irritations, for example a dripping tap, a poorly closing door or an awkwardly placed cabinet, but sometimes they can escalate into disasters.

The benefit of going through the disaster-planning process is that it gives you a chance to focus on what is really important, that is, the safety of the people who work in or visit the HER and the protection of valued information and services. Why put these at risk for the sake of a little time spent on preparation and good housekeeping?

What next?#

This manual offers guidelines to assist in preparing and updating a disaster plan that is tailored to an HER's local circumstances. (See [Panel 7](#) for a disaster-plan template).

B.13.1 Prevention#

There is an alarming range of potential disasters including:

- fire, flood, storm
- supply failures, gas explosion, liquid spillage
- structural collapse

- theft, vandalism, arson
- loss of key staff
- unauthorised access to archives, databases
- works, security breaches and disasters impacting from neighbouring premises
- collision by transport.

Simple precautions often reduce the possibility of a disaster occurring and minimise its effect. There is no substitute for good housekeeping. Take a good look at each of these areas:

- buildings/equipment maintenance
- security
- fire hazard
- location of collections
- storage of collections
- IT.

How vulnerable is each area? Are there any measures that you can take to protect the HER?

Protection measures normally fall into one of four categories:

- avoiding the risk by making changes
- transferring the risk to someone better equipped to manage it
- controlling the risk by installing early-warning systems or safeguards
- accepting the risk if the asset value is low.

B.13.2 Preparedness#

If a disaster happens, it will be a shock. Preparing a written plan helps. This should cover both the procedures to be followed at the moment of disaster, and information to meet immediate requirements. A template is provided to assist (see [Panel 7](#)) but remember that your plan may need to be co-ordinated with a disaster plan for your local authority or department.

Disaster control team#

HERs form part of larger organisations. Any disaster will involve staff from other departments. Your plan should include the names and contact details (at home and at work) of all relevant staff. This must include a **disaster manager** for the HER and contact details for members of staff who can be called out to assist.

Evacuation procedures#

All visitors and members of staff must be evacuated when 'exposed to serious and imminent danger'.

Your plan should document evacuation procedures and should include a floor plan which locates all emergency exits, assembly points, alarms, equipment, etc.

Insurance#

Your plan should include details of any insurance policy and a named point of contact.

Equipment and contacts#

Disasters often involve mess and quantities of water. Assemble basic equipment in advance. In your plan, include a marked floor plan, showing where the service isolation points are, where your emergency equipment is stored and what equipment is available.

Include the names and addresses of contractors who provide maintenance, repair work or specialist services.

Salvage priorities#

What would you save first in a disaster? Make a list and include a floor plan showing where each item is stored in your disaster plan. Label priority items clearly (or the cabinets and drawers in which they are stored) so that they can be rapidly identified in an emergency.

IT#

All HER systems will be regularly backed up with tapes stored offsite. Include details in your plan of whoever is available to restore the HER from back-up in a disaster.

Business contingency planning#

How would you continue to operate if your computers were stolen? Include details in your disaster plan of business contingency plans which will help to keep services running in the event of particular disasters.

Training#

All staff should be regularly trained in emergency evacuation procedures. The disaster manager and members of the disaster team should also be trained in emergency salvage and conservation.

B.13.3 Reaction#

Initial actions on discovering a disaster should be:

Alert#

- Alert the emergency services and evacuate people if necessary
- Contact the senior manager in office hours
- Contact the disaster manager outside office hours.

Initial assessment#

On arriving at the scene the disaster manager will:

- liaise with emergency services
- set up a control point
- assess the damage, when safe to do so brief the disaster team
- stabilise the environment
- secure undamaged material
- organise salvage operations.

Remember that your safety and the safety of the disaster team are paramount. The disaster area should not be entered until it is declared safe by emergency services.

Salvage#

Working conditions may be cold, wet and dirty. There may be lots of heavy work if furniture and equipment are out of place. Warm, old clothes, gloves and stout shoes should be worn.

The disaster manager should organise rest breaks with hot drinks and snacks for the disaster team.

Procedures#

- You should aim to sort undamaged materials from those that are dampened or saturated by water.
- Materials that have been damaged beyond repair should be discarded
- Priority collections and undamaged materials should be secured against possible further damage
- Emergency conservation techniques include air drying, freeze drying and in some cases washing - these techniques are well documented in other literature
- Mould and pest infestations may represent health hazards. Both require monitoring and advice should be sought from experts on how to deal with them.

B.13.4 Recovery#

During the initial recovery phase, procedures should be put into place to allow the HER to continue services at a minimum level.

The disaster manager should initiate recovery procedures to:

- restore IT from back-up
- arrange for the area to be cleaned
- provide access to undamaged material
- list damaged or destroyed equipment and prepare any insurance claims
- order replacement furniture or equipment
- inform management and staff of progress
- review the disaster plan.

Be aware that, in the event of a major disaster staff may become depressed or otherwise affected. You may wish to include details of staff welfare services in your disaster plan or consider other arrangements to support staff coping with the aftermath.

Further information#

- *Disaster Management Planning for Archaeological Archives* IFA/AAF. This paper sets out in the required detail the considerations that need to be addressed in preparing and implementing a disaster management plan for archaeological archives.

Panel 8: Disaster plan template#

Disaster Plan prepared for THE HER on _ by .

The plan will be updated on

updates will be sent to the disaster manager, disaster team members, site managers, etc.
Procedures for initial action on discovering a disaster.

1. Alert the Emergency Services as necessary. Dial (9) 999 and give details of the location and nature of the emergency. Alert Security or Estates as necessary.

1. Alert the Disaster Manager (insert name and contact numbers at home and work) and the most senior staff member in office hours.

1. Evacuate the building in the event of staff and readers being ?exposed to serious and imminent

danger? ([Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1992](#)). Insert procedures. **On arrival at the scene the Disaster manager should:**

1. Liaise with emergency services and establish a control point.
2. Contact the Disaster control team: (insert names and contact details for team members)
3. Contact staff from other Departments (may include: Security, Estates, IT, Finance, Catering,

Senior Management.)

1. Assess the scene and the damage. Stabilise the environment and break out emergency supplies.

1. Organise salvage teams. Salvage priority collections. Secure undamaged material. Arrange rest breaks and refreshments for teams.

Useful information:

Insurance

Insert insurance policy number and a contact details with the insurance company.

Location plans

Insert the following location plans:

- Fire exits, fire extinguishers, smoke alarms, sprinkler systems, assembly points.
- Electrical, water, sewerage, drainage and gas systems; fuse boxes, stop cocks and isolation valves.
- The location of priority collections for salvage, emergency equipment stores and first aid boxes.

Salvage priorities

Insert a list of collection salvage priorities and the names of those responsible for each area.

Emergency equipment

List appropriate emergency equipment available and the precise location of the equipment stores. Equipment may fall into these categories e.g. cleaning, drying, packing.

Suppliers of Emergency Equipment and Services

Identify suppliers of emergency equipment and services. List contact details and contract numbers.