

ESSENTIALS OF LIBRARY DISASTER CONTROL PLANS

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ABSTRACT

This paper defines disaster and disaster control plans. It then examines the need for disaster control planning in libraries as well as the four main sections which comprise a good library disaster control plan, namely the preventive, preparedness, responds, and recovery plans. The essential information to be included in each sub-plan was highlighted and the need to update such information periodically emphasized.

INTRODUCTION

Literarily, a disaster means a great and sudden misfortune or catastrophe (Ghost 2006). In the context of the library, it connotes an unexpected event the occurrence of which may be destructive to the library and its contents. Or, as the M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries (2004) has put it, a library disaster is an event or series of events, such as fire, flood, theft, vandalism, explosion, sudden unavailability of key staff, post-damages etc, which can significantly disrupt the library's ability to support the parent institution over a week or more. Thus given the sudden and disruptive nature of disasters, it is essential that every library be well prepared in advance for disasters and so the need for a disaster control plan (DCP). The DCP, according to Lyall (1993), is a set of documented measures in place in a library to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters. From this definition, it is clear that a comprehensive disaster plan comprises four independent but interrelated smaller plans, which include the preventive, preparedness, response and recovery plans, each of which is discussed in this article.

RATIONALE

There are many reasons why an organization, including the library, should have a disaster control plan. For instance, Mansell (2003) opined that good plans provide a frame work for people to work within, get people focused and think through potential problems and solutions in advance and help to classify people's roles and responsibility in the event of a disaster. As for Mathews (2006), a good plan makes an incident much easier to manage, helps individuals to assess situations and make decisions quickly, minimizes risks and maximizes the speed of recovery, thereby getting the organization back into business quickly. Similarly, Blagg (1997) noted

among other things, that (1) plans allow for preparation in advance for disaster, thus ensuring swift and effective reactions, (2) the presence of a detailed plan helps to reinforce the importance of the whole issue of disaster control planning to all member of the library and (3) written plan is also useful for staff training.

In another development, Geiger (2003) emphasized the need for disaster control plans in libraries, saying that the first step to avoid disaster, or know what to do when a disaster strikes and salvage, or rebuild after a devastating loss is the formulation of a disaster control plans, which every library should have. Also, Ngulube(2005) emphatically said disaster preparedness and security were vital to the preservation and protection of records and archives. Adding that disaster planning "facilitates efficient and quick response to an emergency. Though these remarks were about archives, they equally apply to libraries since the two institutions are repositories of recorded knowledge among others. More recently, the Robinson Library (2008), in a justification of its disaster control plan, noted that the plan was an important part of its efforts to manage library resources so as to limit potential damages when a disaster strikes.

PREVENTIVE PLAN

This is a pre-disaster plan and its objective according to Matthews and Eden (1996), is to foresee and avert potential disasters by assessing areas of vulnerability and taking pre-emptive action. Lyall (1993) listed such areas as personnel, which comprises library staff, users and visitors, collections, building, emergency equipments, and security measures. The assessment of these areas, called risk analysis, is best done by means of a hazard survey, which could be carried out by a committee of the library or an external consultant, where available at an affordable fees. The main issues that should be addressed by such survey as identified by Alegbeleye (1993) are discussed below:

PERSONNEL

The general view in this regard is that the survey should in the main find out whether or not the library staff are adequately trained in collection handing and care; in recognition of unusual developments within and outside the library; in reporting such development to the appropriate authority; and in operating such appliances as fire extinguishers. It should also ascertain whether or not the library staff and visitors are adequately supervised; whether there are any security matters pending with the Police and Fire Department and whether there are any groups that could pose problems to the library among other concerns.

COLLECTION

In this case, the library materials should be checked for signs of infestation and moulds; adequacy of shelving off the floor and dust. The location of the more valuable materials vis-avis sources of water, such as windows, burst pipes, faulty taps, toilets and basement should be given attention as well as the need for creating surrogates of unique items or store them in off-site locations.

BUILDING

The survey should investigate and note any potential of sources of water and fire hazards within and outside the library. Within the library, cognizance should be taken of any sources of water (e.g roof leaks, burst pipes, blocked sinks, faulty taps etc) and fire (e.g. worn-out electrical wires; faulty plugs, fan regulators and air conditioners; unemptied thrash cans etc) disasters. Whether or not there are accessible and conspicuously labeled emergency exits as well as floor plans showing the locations of the rare or special collections. Records and equipment in the library should be verified and noted.

Outside the library, the survey should ascertain the availability of any flood-prone river(s), bush, overgrown tree branches, sewage and blocked drainage near the library as well as the presence of a suitable space for drying wet materials in the event of water disasters. Where applicable, careful consideration should be given to the possibility of land -slides, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions in the vicinity of the library.

EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT

Today, there are many equipments every library should have to promptly and effectively respond to various disasters; so the typical hazard survey should check for the availability and condition of such equipments in the library concerned. In case of fire disasters, for instance, the more important of the emergency devices to look for are fire detection/suppression systems, such as smoke/flame detectors, heat sensors, fire extinguishers, sprinklers and sand buckets, Brooms, trolleys, mops and buckets and inexpensive but useful equipment that should be available in any library for removing uses in case of flooding while plastic crates are most recommended for packing of any water-damaged materials. Water sensing alarms, freezing facilities and dehumidifiers are common devices for containing water damages in libraries. But, as Waters (1939) has pointed out, freezing devices particularly the last or rapid freezing freezers, are so expensive that might not expect to find them in most libraries. Treating any form of infestation often requires the services of a specialist who will normally provide the necessary chemicals and equipments for the treatments, thereby making it unnecessary for the individual libraries to own such materials.

When completed, the risk analysis is likely to highlight the needed improvement in some or all of the foregoing areas. These along with the recommended actions should be noted and incorporated into the preventive plan and by extension the disaster control plan.

THE PREPAREDNESS PLAN

Alegbeleye (1993) defines preparedness as being in a state of alertness and vigilance so that when a disaster occurs the organization is not caught happening but is in apposition to react responsibly, maturely and rationally. More succinctly, preparedness means "getting ready to cope" with disasters at all times (M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries, 2004). Lyall (1993) on the other hand defines preparedness in terms of what the library ought to do in readiness for disaster. They include: identification of important items in the collection, providing for necessary supplies including plastic sheeting, provision of freezing facilities and staff training. In another development, the M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries (2004) listed the various things the library ought to do to the battle - ready for disasters. The list appears more comprehensive than the Lyall's and includes the following:

- Developing written preparedness, response and recovery plans, all of which should be updated and tested periodically.
- Maintaining an up-to-date list of individuals and organizations that can be contacted for one thing or another in the event of a disaster with detailed contact information provided on each.
- Having supplies and equipments ready at all times and maintaining the latter regularly.
- Putting a disaster control team in places clearly stating their responsibilities during all phases of disaster and training them and other staff member properly.
- Making adequate arrangement for funding needs promptly as they arise.
- providing adequate building floor-plans with which every staff should be familiar with and on which the locations of fire exits, cut-off switches vital documentations (eg salvage procedures) documents (eg copies of insurances policies) and holdings should be clearly indicated.

As with the preventive plan, the foregoing and similar information derived from the risk analysis/hazard survey should be noted and incorporated into the preparedness plan. Given, as Lyall (1993) further, the fact that the effectiveness of the response to a disaster, largely depends on the

thoroughness of the preparedness plan, the needs to develop such a plan as part of the larger disaster control plan for a library cannot be over emphasized. Indeed, the general views is that the main purpose of the preparedness plan is to ensure that any ensuing disasters in the library are effectively managed.

THE RESPONSE PLAN

Alegbeleye (1993) defined response as a reaction to a disaster, which according to him and the M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries (2004), involves the following:

- Raising an alarm to alert the library staff and users to the disaster. This should ideally be done by a member of the disaster control team assigned the responsibility in the preparedness plan.
- Notifying the leader of the disaster control team who together with other members arranges to move everybody in the library to safe place; find out the whereabouts of any missing staff members; and mapping out subsequent course of action.
- Stabilizing the disaster area to prevent the growth of mould. This involves, among other steps, switching off all electrical equipments and endeavoring to reduce the relative humidity and temperature of the area to about 50% and 70°F respectively using fans and dehumidifiers in each case.
- Conducting, by assigned members of the disaster control team, an assessment of what types of materials are damaged and to what extent as well as determining the equipments, suppliers and services required. Where necessary, the damaged materials should be photocopied for insurance claim purposes.
- Setting up an area for recording and packing materials which requires freezing or air drying and transport the former to the nearest freezing facility, where available.

The foregoing may not exhaust the list, but they constitute the more important steps to follow in reacting to a disaster, which should be incorporated into the response plan.

THE RECOVERY PLAN

This is the last component of the disaster control plan. It consists of what should be done to get the library back to normal soonest after a disaster. The usual list include, the following (M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries, 2004):-

- Clearing and rehabilitating the disaster site
- Setting priorities for conservation work, and developing a phased conservation programme where large materials are involved, seeking the advice of a conservation in each case.
- Discarding items not worth retaining and replacing or re-binding those that do not justify special conservation treatment.
- Contracting insurers where necessary.
- Revising the disaster control plan in the light of the experience with the disaster.

CONCLUSION

Given the nature of disaster, one may not know when a disaster is going to happen and what form it will take; but it is possible to prevent and contain any forms of disaster. As such, planning for disaster can make the difference between an effective salvage operation and disorganized panic or haphazard response when a disaster strikes. To be effective, however, a disaster control plan should be revised periodically and its contents in each case be familiar to the library staff concerned.

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