

(R)Evolutionary Emergency Planning: Adding Resilience through Continuous Review

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses how a library can revise its existing Emergency, Disaster and Continuity of Operations plans, through the utilization of an ongoing review cycle, new dissemination techniques, and expanded training protocols. While reviews of existing emergency plans typically happen in response to actual emergencies, flipping that scenario by conducting ongoing reviews with a small, dedicated committee will expand preparedness. The paper identifies important steps to follow in revising emergency plans and discusses incorporating e-book and short form formats to enhance training and documentation.

KEYWORDS

Academic Library, Continuity of Operations, Disaster Response, Emergency Management Plan, Emergency Plan, Emergency Preparedness, Safety and Security Team, Staff Training

INTRODUCTION

People are well versed in the benefits of incorporating planning into activities to maximize the impact of effort. When the results of such planning promises to provide a positive outcome, as with planning for retirement or vacation, people recognize the value of a strategic plan and devote the necessary time to ensure a certain result. However, emergency planning, disaster response planning, and contingency planning, while essential to an organization, provide no surety of a positive outcome. This type of planning requires forethought about unpleasant situations and tries to wrangle with an irresolute future. It isn't surprising, then, that even those who are otherwise adept planners will let emergency plans fall out of date until some need or threat spurs them into action. As threats to business operations become more frequent, opportunities for review increase.

Disaster planning is a crucial component of preparedness for libraries and archives. All too often, the impetus to complete a disaster plan happens only after an emergency that has left a library vulnerable, causing it to recognize its failure to plan. Fires, floods, hurricanes, influenza outbreaks, biological, hazardous material, or terrorist threats, are all reasons a library will call up existing plans. Disasters that affect neighboring institutions will likewise sensitize individuals and organizations to the need to review and revise or begin to write emergency plans.

The Library that serves as the example in this article serves the undergraduate and graduate schools on the main campus of our University, and fortunately, hasn't experienced a catastrophic emergency necessitating large scale response. The library has, however, experienced a number of small scale crises that caused us to use and reevaluate our disaster plan and modify the emergency planning methodology to incorporate it into daily work practices. This article documents our past response to emergencies as well as recent developments in our methodology.

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More information on completing a thorough review of your emergency preparedness documents is available from a list of resources that follows this article. Since every library is different, we encourage other libraries to create plans that are going to suit that library's specific needs.

BACKGROUND

Like any institution, academic libraries are vulnerable to natural and man-made disasters. The devastation that can occur when libraries fall victim to natural disasters, such as floods, fires, willful acts of violence and terrorism, has been frequently seen. While such disasters are often unpredictable and instantaneous, libraries may be able to lessen the destructive consequences of any disaster or emergency through the implementation of an emergency management plan. Such a plan is "a unique, detailed guide for times of great stress and crisis," and it serves to "provide the basis for systematic responses to emergencies that threaten an organization and the records and information necessary for continuing operations" (Jones & Keyes, 2008, p. 52). The main components of an emergency management plan include: a policy statement, assignment of responsibilities and authority, task organization, information distribution procedures, preparedness/response/recovery checklists, training programs and testing procedures, and a communications directory (Jones & Keyes, 2008, p. 53).

Much of the early literature addressing library-specific emergency preparedness focused on the protection and recovery of library materials and included detailed instructions and disaster response plans to prevent damage to collections. More recently, the literature presents an increased attention on personal and user safety, greater collaboration with outside agencies and emergency responders, and the use of technologies that can widely disseminate simple, direct and instantaneous instructions to multiple stakeholders in an emerging event. The document *Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans in Institutions for Institutions of Higher Learning* (2013) instructs:

The planning team should consider the following when developing its goals, objectives, and courses of action:

- Accounting for students, faculty, staff, and visitors located in various locations at different points in the day;
- Safely moving students, faculty, staff, and visitors from unsafe areas to designated assembly areas such as classrooms, student housing facilities, campus grounds, dining halls, stadiums, and other IHE locations;
- Evacuating when the primary evacuation route is unusable;
- Evacuating individuals with disabilities (along with service animals and assistive devices, e.g., wheelchairs) and others with access and functional needs, including language, transportation, and medical needs (p. 37).

During the past two decades, advancements in technology and high profile, wide-scale disasters on the national scene have helped to spur these shifts in focus within library emergency management and disaster preparedness.

Early Emergency Preparedness Literature

Early literature, studies and reports reflect a collection-centric focus in library emergency preparedness and response documentation. Documentation resulting from the 1966 flood of the Arno River in Florence, Italy, exemplifies this focus of early emergency response and preservation techniques. Unprepared for the record breaking flood, the citizens of Florence were initially focused on surviving their own personal disasters. Many lives were lost and property was damaged, but it was the destruction of irreplaceable works of art that excited the interest of the press and brought together a team of international conservators, librarians and museum professionals to help recover the damaged

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