

Chapter 64

Emergency Planning (R)Evolution: Making a Comprehensive Emergency Plan for the Present and the Future

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses how a library can revise its existing emergency, disaster, and Continuity of Operations plans, through the utilization of new technologies and an ongoing review cycle. While reviews of existing emergency plans typically happen in response to actual emergencies, this chapter encourages flipping that scenario by conducting ongoing reviews with a small, dedicated committee. The chapter identifies important steps to follow in revising emergency plans and discusses incorporating e-book and short form formats to enhance training and documentation.

INTRODUCTION

People, especially goal-oriented people, incorporate 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. This type of planning requires forethought about unpleasant situations and tries to wrangle with an irresolute future. It isn't surprising, then, that

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even those who are otherwise adept at devoting time to planning will let emergency plans fall out of date until some need or threat goads them into action.

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, all increase the likelihood that a library will review 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.

Located in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, the Z. Smith Reynolds Library serves Wake Forest University undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty and staff members within the College and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the Wake Forest Divinity School, the Wake Forest School of Business, as well as community members within Winston-Salem and surrounding areas. The library serves a student and faculty population of 5,800 with a staff size of 54 full time and approximately 200 student assistants. Fortunately, the Z. Smith Reynolds Library at Wake Forest hasn't experienced a catastrophic emergency necessitating large scale response. The library has, however, experienced a number of crises that caused us to use and reevaluate our disaster plan and modify the emergency planning methodology to incorporate it into daily work practices. Utilizing the Z. Smith Reynolds Library as a case study, this chapter will suggest practices for seeking administrative support, undergoing safety and emergency training, identifying community and campus partners, and writing appropriate documentation, while furthering emergency preparedness comprehension and strengthening relationships in the library, on campus and in the surrounding community.

More information on completing a thorough review of your emergency preparedness documents is available in a list of resources that follows this chapter. Since every library is different, please use these as guides only. We encourage you to create plans that are going to suit your 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 and fires, or willful acts of violence and terrorism, has been demonstrated throughout history. 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 for preparing a disaster response plan to prevent damage to collections. More recently, the interested researcher will see 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

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