Chapter 52
Shortcomings and Successes:
A Small-Scale Disaster Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Through the presentation of a case study, this chapter will address the lessons learned from a small scale, anthropogenic water disaster that occurred in the stacks area of Miami University's Wertz Art and Architecture Library. The purpose of this chapter is to assess the shortcomings and the successes of the incident response, and to show how even small-scale disasters can highlight both the strengths and weaknesses of a disaster plan. Key lessons learned include the importance of an updated and usable disaster plan; the importance of clear communication before, during, and after an event; and the importance of developing a good relationship with outside responders. Recommendations and solutions taken by MU Libraries are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Through the presentation of a case study, this chapter will address the lessons learned from a small scale, anthropogenic water disaster that occurred in the stacks area of Miami University Libraries' Wertz Art and Architecture Library. The incident occurred when a pipe valve was left open during a construction project, and water began flowing out of the open valve. While Miami University (MU) Libraries had a disaster plan in place, the response and recovery process ran into several roadblocks that have since caused both MU Libraries and outside responding departments to re-evaluate their policies and procedures.

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the shortcomings and the successes of the incident response, and to show how even small-scale disasters can highlight both the strengths and weaknesses of a disaster plan. Key lessons learned include the importance of an updated and usable disaster plan; the importance of clear communication before, during, and after an event; and the importance of developing a good relationship with outside responders such as the university's physical facilities department and other local agencies. Recommendations and solutions taken by MU Libraries are also discussed.

BACKGROUND

"Disaster response is the procedures and processes whereby a team of trained individuals responds to a disaster and determines how to best recover the damaged materials so that 'business as usual' can resume as quickly as possible" (Kahn, 2012, p. 2.) When discussing disaster preparedness and response, it is easy to get bogged down in the different terminology that's used. Muir and Shenton (2002) make note that "A number of terms are used interchangeably in the literature, including disaster planning, disaster control planning, and emergency or contingency planning. Risk management has also become fashionable" (p. 115). The terminology used when discussing disaster response can vary depending on time period – earlier works preferred the use of "disaster preparedness" while the current literature has shifted towards phrases such as emergency planning and business continuity planning (Dadson, 2012, pp. 6-7). Region can also play a part in differing terminology – the US seems to prefer disaster response and planning (Kahn, 2012), while the UK tends towards phrases such as counter disaster planning (Mansell, 2003) or disaster control plan (Matthews, Smith, & Knowles, 2009). For this chapter the phrases disaster preparedness and disaster response are both used, as is the phrase continuous operations plan to describe MU Libraries' disaster plan.

OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Much of the literature on disaster preparedness takes the form of guides or handbooks. Kulczak and Lennertz's *A Decade of Disaster: A Selected Bibliography of Disaster Literature, 1985-1995* lists over forty titles under the heading "plans and planning manuals" (as cited in Matthews, Smith, & Knowles, 2004).

There is one early publication on disaster preparedness that more closely resembles recent publications in its approach. Bohem's (1978) paper *Disaster Prevention and Disaster Preparedness* was written in response to what she saw as a glaring omission. Bohem states in the foreword "despite mini-disasters which had struck libraries of two UC campuses in recent years, in which valuable materials had been lost, not one library within the UC system, not even those which had suffered, had a comprehensive disaster plan." Bohem goes on to offer a text that is not a model plan but rather a "fairly comprehensive list of factors and options, to suit individual situations, and to be considered in the formulation of individualized disaster plans" (p. iii).

More recent publications such as Wellheiser and Scott (2002), Kahn (2012), and Dadson (2012) take a more in-depth approach to disaster preparedness describing in great detail each part that makes up a successful disaster plan, such as planning, prevention, collections salvage, and business continuity among, other aspects. Wellheiser and Scott (2002) cover both the purpose and the process for each stage of disaster planning including preparedness, response, and post-disaster planning. Dadson (2012) goes on to offer suggestions on how to test a plan's efficiency once it is written. Kahn (2012) includes specific recovery procedures based on material type as well as a series of checklists and forms that can be used as part of a disaster response.

Included in these basic planning handbooks are guides based on case studies and surveys. Matthews and Feather (2003) offer an edited volume that includes information on fire, flood, and psychological aspects of disaster management, all contributed by authors with first hand experience of the subject matter. Alire's (2000) edited handbook provides a wide array of information including but not limited

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