

## Disaster Planning

As promised, this month I will be focusing on disaster planning. This morning I presented a talk about personal papers entitled “Preserving Memories: Maintaining Family Photographs and Memorabilia.” A couple of people brought up disaster related concerns such as “What do I do in the event of fire?” and “What happens if my hard drive with all of my digital photos crashes?” With this in mind, I sit down to write and address my comments to both cultural heritage professionals and laymen with similar concerns about their personal papers.

The best thing we can do for disaster planning is preparation. If you consider all the possible disasters that might affect your materials, you can ready yourself for the worst. Disaster Planning is a big subject. So, I have provided some bare bones basics in my introduction and have added a list of links to helpful websites at the end.

During my talk this morning, a woman showed a framed image of her family to the audience and told us that if there were ever a fire in her home, this would be the item that she would grab. Have you considered what your most vital documents are? Which items deserve extra special care in your collection and should be considered vital records? Losing anything would be a loss for your fam-

ily or institution, but the loss of what specific items would have the greatest informational, evidential or sentimental impact? Be prepared to move these if you are able to without endangering yourself. Make sure that everyone knows that these are the items to save first.

To make your intentions known, institutions should create a formal Disaster Plan that lists information about what to do in the event of a disaster. The document should define different scenarios. Include information about safely leaving the building who is responsible for the collections, who will be communicating with emergency personnel and how. Families should also consider the impact a disaster would have and should know of how to handle themselves in any emergency. Create a written document that considers the well-being of family members and addresses protection of your personal belongings.

Disasters come in many forms. They can include dramatic events such as fires and floods. But they may also include more “run of the mill” events such as long-term loss of power that effects climate controls and exposes collections to the elements. (Those of us in New England are very familiar with this after last year’s ice storm.) Disasters can include pest infestation or hard drive failure. Sometimes one disaster can lead

to another. For example, an outbreak of fire can cause water damage when sprinklers are set.

With your plan, keep a list of professionals who can help you with problems as they occur. Record the names of individuals at institutions that can assist you. You should consider such businesses as area conservators, extermination, and water salvage companies. Determine who can provide fans, generators, computer restoration services, and any of the help you may need if any type of disaster strikes. Call companies and introduce yourself. Learn procedures for obtaining their assistance in the event of a disaster. Do not wait until a disaster occurs to try to track down information about who can help you and how. You will be frazzled enough keeping things in check even with the necessary information in hand. Do not give yourself the added burden of finding the help that you need at the scene.

Keep copies of your disaster plan on-site and off-site. Cultural heritage institutions should give fire and police departments copies of their plans and collaborate with them so that they know your intentions, the vital parts of your collection, and your emergency procedures. Familiarize yourself with their procedures as well. Inform your local safety officials about your collections and which items are most important to secure. They can try to ensure the safety of these materials first, if at all possible.

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Institutions must include in their plans a list of staff responsibilities and procedures for staff to follow at each stage of a disaster. Include instructions for emergency evacuation procedures, how to care for collections during a disaster and after. Maintain a disaster supply kit so you don't need to track down equipment when there are plenty of other things on your mind.

There are some disasters we can avoid. Regular maintenance of systems and housecleaning can cut down on risks.

There is a lot of help out there. Make your disaster plan as detailed as possible to ready yourself for anything. We have seen the effects of flooding and other

terrible disasters in recent years. A disaster can strike anyone. Being prepared will help avoid panic in a terrible situation.

### Resources to Assist with Disaster Planning

**Conservation Online Disaster Preparedness and Response** (the most comprehensive directory of links to disaster information that I know) <http://cool.conservation-us.org/bytopic/disasters/>

**An Introduction to Fire Protection Systems** (from Western Ass. For Art Protection linked from CoOL's web site) <http://cool.conservation-us.org/waac/wn/wn16/wn16-3/wn16-309.html>

**National Park Service Primer for Disaster** (procedures for just about every case scenario) <http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/publications/primer/primintro.html>

**Emergency Recovery Kit** <http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/publications/conservoogram/21-02.pdf>

**Northeast Document Conservation Center**—New England is fortunate to have the good folks at the NEDCC in Andover, MA to provide advice and assistance (to institutions AND individuals.) I always go to them first when I have preservation and conservation questions. [www.nedcc.org/disaster/disaster.php](http://www.nedcc.org/disaster/disaster.php) (978) 470-1010  
**NEDCC Disaster Hotline** 978-470-1010

**NEDCC Disaster Planning Tool** <http://www.nedcc.org/disaster/dplan.php>

**Family Disaster Plan** - provided by The National Disaster Education Coalition this document provides good basic information for family preparation, but does not give consideration to cultural heritage items in the home. Families should also prepare for disaster by considering what personal items are most important to them and by familiarizing themselves with cultural heritage professionals, conservators, and disaster recovery companies that can assist them. <http://www.disastercenter.com/guide/family.htm>

See **AIC Ten Tips for the Homeowner** <http://www.conservation-us.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageId=597>



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