



Tom Clareson, manager of Education and Planning for OCLC Digital Collection Preservation Services, explores the components of a disaster plan, including contact with local public safety agencies, a physical evacuation strategy, and how to preserve different formats and types of publications.

Tom Clareson, manager of Education and Planning for OCLC Digital Collection Preservation Services, is an expert in preservation and digitization methods. He delivered a well-organized and thorough presentation in July at the 2003 AALL Annual Meeting titled “Maximize Your Library’s Survival: Elements of An Effective Disaster Plan.”

This topic intrigued me for several reasons but primarily because of a presentation by Captain Al Haynes I had the privilege of attending several years ago that has forever changed the way I approach my surroundings. Captain Haynes was the pilot in command of Flight 232 that crashed on July 19, 1989, in Sioux City, Iowa. Among other messages in his presentation, he praised the disaster preparedness of the Sioux City community and felt strongly that this was key to limiting the loss of life in that disaster. His closing words counseled the audience to always be aware of your surroundings in order to get to safety. As with Clareson’s presentation, the message is clear. If you know how to get yourself to safety, you will be able to lead others to safety, too. Beyond that primary directive, Clareson offered an abundance of practical information to prepare and protect the personnel, patrons and collection of a library. Clareson’s presentation challenged each member of the audience to consider his or her preparedness. One must ask: Do I have a plan for disaster? Am I prepared?

At the outset, Clareson clarified that the presentation was not designed to cause excessive worry but rather to encourage preparation for disasters. Ideally, good preparation results in disaster prevention. However, many disasters, particularly weather-related disasters, are unavoidable. In these instances, the goal is to avoid major damage by being prepared to respond quickly and safely.

Of paramount importance is personal safety: All library employees should be able to get themselves to safety and to lead others to safety. Clareson cautioned that one should leave disaster recovery to the experts in any situation where exposure to unknown substances or other hazards is even a slight possibility.

Covering a tremendous amount of information — this 90-minute presentation condensed what he usually covers in a two-day workshop on disaster planning — Clareson commenced the presentation with eight reasons why a library should have a disaster plan:

1. Emergencies happen all the time.
2. A disaster plan is part of sound asset management of a major capital expenditure.
3. Services must be up and running 24/7.
4. A plan ensures survival of and access to the greatest amount of materials.
5. It assures that the collection survives in the best possible shape.
6. It may result in a reduction of insurance premiums.
7. It achieves the goal of proper stewardship of data and documents.
8. It uses practical risk assessment to produce effective risk management.

Developing a disaster plan requires information gathering, implementation and ongoing maintenance. Selecting an effective disaster plan team is key to creating a disaster plan. Libraries with limited personnel can turn to expertise within the supporting institution or community, or may choose to contract for some services. The essential roles are as follows:

1. Team leader — recognized for leadership and communication skills
2. Crew manager — able to work with outside resources or to contract for services
3. Financial administrator — authorized to expend funds without additional approval
4. Recovery specialist — knowledgeable in the formats of materials
5. Building manager — familiar with floor plans and mechanicals
6. Security director — authorized to secure the premises during recovery
7. Recorder/photographer — capable of recording every item leaving the facility
8. Communications officer — one person to maintain control of media information
9. Supplies and transportation manager — capable of getting what you need when you need it

Program Outlines Elements of an Effective Disaster Plan

*Communication, Role
Assignments Key to
Disaster Preparedness*

by Katherine Coolidge

The first task in developing a plan is to conduct both a building survey (internal) and an environmental trends survey (external). The building survey should include the construction of the building, its condition, the location of drainage, the location of the collection, climate control, pollutants, light sources, pest control and housekeeping. Potential disasters from the external environment include proximity to highways, railroads, airports, industrial plants, flood plains and vegetation.

Clareson provided useful tips for risk assessments and prevention of potential disasters from water, fire, mold and pests. To prevent water damage, regularly inspect the roof, drainage, and condition of pipes and plumbing (label all pipes). Avoid basement storage and all water sources above a collection. Keep all shelves at least four inches off the floor and use water detectors near doors. To prevent fire risks, implement fire-prevention technology in the building design, train the staff in fire safety, install fire-detection devices and signage, and keep fire-suppression equipment handy. Fire drills should be conducted twice a year.

To prevent damage from mold, regularly clean the collection, storage and staff areas; avoid indoor plants; keep the relative humidity below 55 percent; find and remove sources of moisture; clean the HVAC system; and isolate all incoming and infested collections to conduct a mold assessment. Damage from pests may be controlled by sealing routes of entry, controlling water and food sources, and regularly cleaning and isolating incoming collections. Not all disasters are sudden. Rather they occur over time due to neglect, so regular attention to these details is important.

An effective disaster plan establishes recovery priorities by identifying the most important collections, factoring in the composition of the records and considering services available to the library. The team will want to take into account subject strengths; irreplaceable, rare or unique collections; mandated vital or archival records; the ease of salvaging those items; and availability of freezer space or vacuum-sealing services. Choosing recovery priorities will cause

the greatest disagreement among team members. However, it is essential to have priorities well established before a disaster occurs; team members won't have time to discuss and select their priorities during a disaster recovery, and the team must not waste time working at cross-purposes.

A good way to develop a plan is to establish a resource of "best practices" from similar libraries and sort the information by type of material, type of emergency and size of disaster. Libraries should also maintain lists of local emergency agencies, as well as staff and supplier contact information, including discount and home-improvement stores where items like tarps and pumps can be readily obtained. The disaster plan should include an emergency fund and simplified accounting procedures for accessing the fund at a moment's notice. Finally, the planning process should include a review of the insurance policy to understand any limitations or exclusions. The building(s) and contents should be appraised at least every five years, with pictures or videos of the collection stored off-site.

Any plan is ineffective unless it is appropriately implemented and communicated, so a written version of the plan should be distributed to library staff. The elements of a written plan include:

organization-wide collection priorities; prevention and protection strategies; a check list for pre-disaster actions; and instructions for response and recovery.

Clareson offered the following resources for additional information on disaster planning:

- Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel, Heritage Preservation for the Heritage Response Task Force: <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/programs/wheel.htm>
- Federal Emergency Management Agency: <http://www.fema.gov>
- Northeast Document Conservation Center: 978/470-1010, <http://www.nedcc.org>
- Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts: 215/545-0613, <http://www.ccaha.org>
- Southeastern Library Network: 800/999-8558, <http://www.solinet.net>
- Amigos Library Services: 800/843-8482, <http://www.amigos.org>
- OCLC Digital Collection and Preservation Services: 800/848-5878, extension 6071, tom_clareson@oclc.org

Clareson is an engaging speaker who clearly put a lot of thought into his concise presentation. Although attendees could have learned more by reviewing specific situations that centered on disaster planning, the time limitation prevented Clareson from delving into detailed scenarios. He kept his examples short but vivid. The audience was particularly amused by his example regarding damage by pests that involved the "discovery" of Davy Crockett's coonskin hat in a Texas library. The "hat" turned out to be a dead squirrel. Lesson learned — even items in storage must be revisited on a regular basis because disasters are everywhere. Are you prepared?

Katherine Coolidge (kcoolidge@bulkley.com) is a law librarian at Bulkley Richardson and Gelinas in Springfield, Mass.



Attendees learn not only how to develop a disaster plan but also how to keep it updated and how to make their libraries part of the long-range planning process.

an emergency information sheet; an introduction to the plan focusing on the building(s) and collection(s); a communications plan/telephone tree; a description of the