How To

Develop a Disaster Plan

A Disaster preparedness plan is essentially an outline for people to follow in the event of a disaster. It's impossible to think of every possible calamitous event that might befall your organisation, but if you have a well-prepared plan it will prevent an emergency from becoming a catastrophe.

Keep your plan as simple and succinct as possible. There will be significant background research required and you may have detailed backup files but the main plan should be slim, clear and concise. Nobody wants to rifle through volumes of instructions to find the plumber's phone number when there's a burst pipe pouring water into the main exhibition space.

The basic steps in writing a disaster preparedness plan are explained in more detail in *Be Prepared: Guidelines for Small Museum Writing a Disaster Preparedness Plan*: https://aiccm.org.au/disaster/disaster-planning

Assess all risks and threats

Look at the history of disasters that have occurred both in your organisation and the local community (remember to include smaller incidents of leaks, roof damage by fallen tree, overflowing toilets etc).

Think about the sort of risks that may occur in your area (floods, fires, cyclones, industrial accidents, vandalism etc.)

Rate the likelihood and impact of each of these.

Reduce or remove those risks

One of the immediate benefits of the first phase of Disaster Preparedness is the opportunity to identify the repairs and maintenance activities that need to be done around the building and provide further impetus to act upon them.

Make a list of those items and the people you would call in the event of each specific disaster occurring.

Your list should include contacts for repair of rooves, clearing of gutters and establishing a maintenance schedule.

Prioritse the collection

Look at this both in terms of significance and vulnerability.

List the methods of protection and the steps for removal or retrieval of the most important items in the collection.

Establish a disaster response team

Keep in mind peoples availability, suitability and proximity to the museum.

Establish a support network

Identify where you can establish relationships for broader community support; can the museums in the area band together to support each other?

Collate information for responding to a potential disaster

This needs to have clear, simple instructions that anybody in the organisation can act upon.

It will include emergency responses to identified risks such power failure, electrical storms, floods and fire.

Assemble floor plans, emergency contacts, a safety checklist and a collection priority list to make it easy for staff to respond.

Collate information for the disaster recovery plan

This is where the medium to long term action takes place, stabilising the environment, moving damaged objects, drying wet objects, dehumidifying the building, rebuilding etc.

An excellent resource to purchase and have on hand with your disaster supplies is a copy of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences' publication, *All is not lost: the collection recovery book*: https://maas.museum/product/all-is-not-lost-the-collection-recovery-book

The strength of this publication is the inclusion of images to illustrate basic instructions for salvaging damaged materials. It covers how to control mould outbreaks, how to dry waterlogged books and paper and emergency first aid for wet paintings, photographs, furniture etc.

Train all staff

This should be considered an ongoing process and must ensure that new members of the organisation are informed about the plan as part of their induction.

Review the plan

Your plan needs to be reviewed as circumstances change; whether this is a change of personnel, relocation to different premises, modifications to the building, and to accommodate changes to the general environment as they occur.

If you do experience a disaster, it's important to review the plan afterwards, to see where it could be improved.

You might also like:

The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM)
Bushfires: Protect Your Precious Possessions

https://aiccm.org.au/sites/default/files/docs/AICCM_Brochures/bushfire-protection.pdf

National Library of Australia (NLA)
Collection disaster plan

https://www.nla.gov.au/policy-and-planning/collection-disaster-plan

Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)
Disaster Preparation and Planning

https://www.alia.org.au/information-and-resources/disaster-planning

Museum of Arts and Applied Sciences (MAAS)
All is not lost: the collection recovery book

https://maas.museum/product/all-is-not-lost-the-collection-recovery-book

The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM)

https://www.aiccm.org.au/

The Foundation for Advancement in Conservation

http://www.conservation-us.org/about-us/foundation

Museum of Arts and Applied Sciences (MAAS) Conservation

https://maas.museum/research/conservation/