Disaster Planning in Libraries

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Abstract:

Disasters in libraries and other related information centres have become a common occurrence in the recent past in all parts of the world. This article explores the importance and measures that can be taken to avoid the disasters and minimize the effect of all types of natural and man-made disasters in the library. Current literature on disaster management will be received to determine the new trends in these fields.

Introduction:

"By failing to prepare, we are preparing to fail"- Benjamin Franklin

Prevention is always better than cure. This is also true of disasters. While many disasters cannot be prevented, being prepared for disasters helps mitigate both the risk and the damage and also builds up resilience to face it. Prevention involves risk assessment, taking mitigating measures and disaster planning including rescue and recovery operations. The focus of disaster prevention is generally a disaster plan in which policies, procedures and practices to cope with a disaster are spelt out.

The need for disaster planning is sometimes questioned. "Proponents of this view take the attitude that disaster will occur whether we like it or not. Therefore, it is better to let nature take its course, and use all available means of assistance to build a better tomorrow. The vast majority of international experience indicates that where plans did not exist, or where planning was inadequate, then the effects of disaster on countries and their peoples have been worse than would have otherwise been the case".

"Plans minimise risk, maximise the speed of recovery and help the organisation to get back into business quickly". An additional advantage of a disaster plan is that it provides a common reference and assigns clear allocation of responsibilities. Further it provides a setting against which to review and evaluate current and future disaster management requirements.

Risk/Disaster in Libraries:

Disaster is any incident which threatens human safety and damages or threatens to damage a library building, collection or items, equipment, systems and services disaster can also be defined as "an event whose timing is unexpected and whose consequences are seriously destruction." Disaster can have serious financial implication and also cause disruption of services. In fact there is no library in the world that is free from risk and disaster, whether natural or man-made can happen any time in any part of the world? In spite of the above scenarios, most of the libraries do not have disaster

control plans. As a result, there is need to sensitize senior managers so that the institutions can be prepared. In order to avoid disasters to affect the library and information centre in research institutions, it is necessary to have a disaster management plan. Risk management is the process of measuring or assessing risk and the development strategies to manage the risk

Kinds of Risk/Disaster:

There are three main kinds/types of risk/disaster:

1. Natural Disasters
2. Human/man-made Disasters
3. Technical Disaster

Natural Disasters:

- Rain
- Flood and Cyclone
- Earthquakes and drought
- Biological damages
- Micro-organisms, insects or vermin infestation
- Volcanic eruptions
- Cold wave and thunder storms
- Heat waves and mud slides
- Air quantity: temperature and humidity
- Sinkholes, etc

Man Made Disasters:

- Acts of war and terrorism
- Fires
- Water (broken pipes, leaking roofs, blocked drains)
- Explosions
- Liquid chemical pollution
- Building deficiencies (Structure, design, environment, maintenance)
- Power failures

Technical Disaster:

- Collapse of shelving and other indoor structural accidents.
- Computer system failure
- Elevator failure

- Power failure
- Heating and cooling system failure
- Telecommunication failure

Disaster Plan:

A variety of terminology is used to refer to disaster plans namely Disaster Control Plan, Disaster Response Plan, Disaster Management Plan, Emergency Operations Plan, Disaster Preparedness Plan, Library Disaster Plan, Collection Disaster Plan, Disaster Recovery Plan or simply Disaster Plan. These plans are fairly similar in contents although there are differences in the details given.A disaster plan provides a clear and coherent approach to dealing with disaster. It is advised that a disaster plan should be:

- Written- or it will not be remembered.
- Simple- or it will not be understood.
- Disseminated- or it will not be in the hands of those who need it.
- Tested- or it will not be practical, and
- Revised- or it will not be up-to-date.

Even in the case of library disasters it is better that staff accepts and understands the advantages of emergency preparedness rather than learn through hard experiences. Disasters not only damage the library collections, the library building, and harm the library staff and the readers but also disrupt the services. If libraries are prepared, it will help the library to minimise the impact of a disaster and restore collections and resume services at the earliest. As in national disasters, so also in library disasters it is better to be defensive and preventive rather than taking action only when disasters strike. It may be too late by then LIS professional literature provides several guidelines and checklists for the use of disaster planning in libraries. Further, in the last two decades many libraries have developed and put on the web, their disaster management plans which can also bereferred by other libraries seeking to develop their own plans. However, there are hardly any guidelines developed for Indian libraries, nor have Indian libraries shared their disaster plans if any.

Framework for a Model Disaster Plan:

The following framework provides an outline of the general aspects that it is suggested should be included in a disaster plan. It is important to note that each library operates under different circumstances and conditions, and therefore, each library has different needs. Thus, the model disaster plan has not been developed to satisfy the specific needs of any particular library, but to provide general guidelines as to the format, content and layout of a disaster plan, which can be adapted to suit specific needs.

General Requirements and Consideration:

It is essential that a disaster plan be formally developed, structured and documented. In the event of a disaster, people often tend to panic and forget even the most obvious and well-rehearsed procedures. It is, thus, important that the plan be well researched and relevant to the library's specific needs. The procedures laid out should be concise, clear and simply explained. All staff should be aware of the existence of such a plan and the location of the copies. Disaster team members should be clearly designated, they should be well versed in the emergency procedures and have their own copies of the plan at hand at all times. Without being too lengthy or verbose, the plan should provide all theessential information needed to cope with the immediate reaction and recovery procedures.

A further benefit of a written disaster plan is that the eventuality might arise that the staff member(s) who is (are) responsible for disaster reaction might not be available when a disaster does occur and the other staff member(s) present would then be able to take charge and follow procedures as outlined in the written plan. This would be very difficult to do without a written guideline. It is also essential to set up a disaster team, which would be responsible for the disaster planning process.

In the initial stages of the development of such a plan, experts in the field should be consulted, as well as libraries which have already developed their own disaster plans, and, those that have experienced a disaster(s). Particularly in the Indian context, where financial and staff resources are limited, co-operation between libraries in the sharing of both resources and skills, would be highly recommended.

Main Components of a Disaster Plan:

The following are considered to be the main components that a disaster plan should contain:

List of personnel:

This section should include the names, addresses and telephone numbers of all the members of the disaster team. The leader of the team should be clearly indicated. The names, addresses and telephone numbers of all the staff who are willing to volunteer their services in the event of an emergency should further also be incorporated.

Disaster reaction procedures:

This section must include

- A summary of the reaction and evacuation procedures.
- Procedures for contacting disaster team members, and volunteer staff, if not already on site. Procedures for alerting emergency services, such as the fire department and external expert consultants.
- Reaction procedures relevant to different types of disasters. There should be a brief explanation about how to deal with different types of disasters. For example, in the

event of a power failure, staff must know where the battery-operated equipment is stored and where the uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) is located.

- A floor plan indicating the location of fire extinguishers, emergency exits, and, gas-, water- and electricity main switches should be included.
- The location of disaster supplies must be indicated.
- Procedures for immediate disaster reaction must be explained.
- Procedures for determining further potential threats and assessing the stability of the building, before it can be entered safely to assess the damage.
- Procedures for evacuating the materials to a safe, temporary storage area.

Salvage and recovery procedures:

Once the material is in a safe storage area, prompt decisions must be taken regarding salvage procedures, according to the different types and extent of the damage. Swift reaction is important as, for example, in the event of water damage, mould will begin to grow within 48 hours. This section must, therefore, include the following guidelines:

- Each type of recovery procedure, for example freeze drying, vacuum-freeze drying, air drying, amongst others, should be briefly explained.
- Volunteers must be organized to help with the assessing and sorting of damaged materials.
- The damage must be assessed, preferably with the help of an expert, and the material must be sorted according to the different types of salvage procedures required. Guidelines should be provided for the assessing of damaged materials.
- The material that has to be sent to external contractors then has to be carefully packed into crates ready for transportation, for example, to freeze-drying or vacuum-drying facilities.
- Water damaged materials which can be air dried on site, must be placed in a safe storage area with the pages fanned out to facilitate drying.
- The building must be assessed to determine the extent of the damage and clearing up must begin as soon as possible.
- A decision would have to be taken concerning the possible closure of the library to the public during the clearing-up process, and possible re-opening dates would have to be announced.

Equipment and Supplies:

This section should include the following details:

- The location of disaster boxes, which should contain the materials immediately required for reaction procedures, as well as materials needed for the packing, securing and crating of damaged materials to the recovery section, or for transportation to external facilities.

- The contents of a disaster box which should consist, amongst others, of: plastic sheeting; scissors; un-printed newsprint; buckets; absorbent mops; large rubbish bins; large garbage bags; soft cloths; paper pads and pencils; heavy duty masking tape; plastic crates for transportation; weights: blotting paper; bookends; torches; sponges; wax paper; dust-cloths.
- Various kinds of equipment will also be necessary, and the location of this equipment must be indicated if available on the premises. Alternatively it must be stated from where each item can be hired, or otherwise obtained. The following are examples of equipment that might be required: wet and dry vacuum cleaners; hand or batteryoperated water pumps; fire extinguishers; fans; dehumidifiers; water hoses
- Protective clothing and first aid supplies must also be provided. In disaster areas where there is overflowing water or burst pipes, there is a very real danger of contamination due to leaking sewage. Cases have been reported where rescue workers have fallen ill due to such contamination. Items of protective clothing should include: waterproof aprons, overalls and pants; waterproof boots; rubber gloves; hard hats; a first aid box should be kept on the site, in case of cuts or burns.

Priority materials:

This section should include

- A clear indication of which important and/or rare materials should be evacuated first.
- The evacuation order must be clearly stated, if there are different categories of such materials.
- Floor plans indicating the location of these materials.

Directory of external services and products:

A list of local providers of services and back-up facilities is an essential part of the disaster plan. Their names, addresses and phone numbers should be given. In each case a second contact name should be given in case the first is not available. The directory should include the following:

- Equipment hire places, freezing and transport services.
- Emergency services, such as the police and fire department.
- Disaster management experts, who have agreed to provide help and advice, when needed

Co-operative arrangements:

This section should include:

- The details of co-operative arrangements, which exist to share facilities and services in the event of an emergency.
- The nature and full details of the co-operative agreement must be indicated.

- The names and contact numbers of disaster managers at the other institutions must be given.

Insurance:

This section should include:

- Details regarding insurance cover, claim procedures, and conditions of insurance.
- The adherence to insurance conditions IS important, In order not to jeopardize the validity of possible claims. For example, the damaged premises might have to be inspected by an insurance agent, before anything is moved or any clearing up begins.
- Contact phone numbers of the insurance agent responsible

Procedures for obtaining emergency funding

Very often, in an emergency, ready cash is needed for various reasons, such as the purchasing of extra disaster supplies. Arrangements should be made to have access to contingency funds to meet such needs.

The following sections should also be included in the disaster plan. They do not refer directly to emergency procedures, but are routine activities which should be conducted regularly as preventative measures.

Arrangements for regular building inspections

The method of inspection and the frequency between inspections should be indicated. If inspections are carried out by external contractors, then contact names and phone numbers should be provided.

Arrangements for regular inspection of security equipment

Facilities such as fire extinguishers and security alarms should be regularly inspected to ensure that they are in good working order. Details of the service contractor, contact names and phone numbers should be provided, as well as information regarding the optimum frequency of such inspections

Arrangements for regular emergency drills

Routine emergency and evacuation drills are essential, both to ensure that staff are aware of procedures, and, that emergency procedures, exits and equipment such as fire alarms, are in working order. This section should include:

- The list of staff member(s) responsible for organizing emergency drills.
- Frequency of emergency drills.
- Details of the evacuation route, and the equipment and exits, which must be checked in the process.

Appendices

The appendices should include floor plans, indicating where priority materials are located, the location of emergency exits, security and safety equipment, and, the

location of disaster boxes and equipment. Other items which can be included in the appendices are disaster reaction flow charts, damage lists and any other additional information that a specific library wishes to include.

Conclusion:

In conclusion it can be stated that it is important that all libraries have a formal disaster plan and disaster management procedures. In order that this can be achieved, management in libraries should recognize that it is important in practice and afford it more attention than it receives at present. Such a response will assist to dispel the apathetic attitude which exists with regard to disaster planning.

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