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Library and archives disaster planning goes by many names: contingency planning, disaster planning, emergency planning, risk assessment, business continuity, etc. This is quite a dictionary considering that until 1966, disaster planning for libraries was an unknown concept. The flood of 1966, when the Arno River in Florence, Italy, overflowed and sent muddy, oily water flowing through the Biblioteca Nazionale is generally recognized as the catalyst for the field of library disaster planning and preservation in general. Most recently in 2015 we’ve seen the near total destruction of the Academic Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences (INION) in Moscow, where millions of items burned in an enormous fire. Today disaster planning is a distinguished field in and of itself, with an ever-growing presence in the international consciousness.

Any type of contingency planning for libraries is important because we are building more and more evidence that preparedness is possible, even if prevention is not. The definition of a disaster is an unpredictable event, and perhaps our time is wasted trying to plan for each and every contingency. The type of disaster and the type of damage it will incur are random variables. What we can do, however, and with some degree of success, is prepare the one variable over which we do have control – ourselves. Ideally, disaster planning should be second nature to library and archives staff. We can better arm ourselves by fostering a culture of responsibility, appropriate training, and a dynamic disaster plan. These things will prove much more effective and useful in any disaster situation than a thick manual full of “what if” situations.

For our part, my colleague Emy Decker and I came by our interest in disaster planning by happenstance: we each spent our childhoods in disaster-prone areas of the United States. During my childhood in Orlando, Florida, major hurricanes hit the panhandle area (Elena ’85), south Florida (Andrew ’92), and raged through the Gulf of Mexico to target Texas (Gilbert ’88). Then, in 2004, I watched as not one, but four major storms made landfall in Florida: Charley, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne. Charley and Jeanne crossed paths over Orlando, and the aftermath was heartbreaking. Emy grew up in Southern California, under constant threat of “The Big One.” Like hurricanes along the Gulf Coast, earthquakes were a way of life for Emy. While the rest of the country made jokes about “beachfront property in Arizona,” Emy lived with it as a real possibility.

Though this topic naturally lends itself to our career interests, many librarians never give a second thought to disaster planning until they are confronted with a disaster themselves. “Those managing a crisis are learning and digesting new information at every point in the crisis management cycle,” writes Mahauganee Shaw in chapter 15, “Navigating Campus Disasters from Within the Library: Lessons and Implications from Gulf Coast Institutions.” It is an area of study in which many people gain their expertise over the course of several months, rather than through a lifetime of research. The purpose of this edited
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volume, therefore, is to explore libraries impacted by disasters of different scales, ranging from small to catastrophic and disasters of different types, from naturally occurring to anthropogenic. This book will benefit those individuals tasked with developing and implementing disaster plans. Ideally, when read in advance of a disaster, this compendium of individual case studies and theories will better inform disaster plans at the design level. Additionally, it serves as a resource for those who have already experienced disaster: reading the stories of librarians and archivists who have had similar encounters will help those dealing with disaster by providing shared experiences, points of comparison, and ideas for what to do in the future. This may potentially spur positive change in organizational culture.

The literature for this topic spans the decades of the 1990s and 2000s, with a decided spike post-2004. This was in response to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction instituted in 1989 by the United Nations General Assembly. It can also be traced back to the Indonesian tsunami in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The seminal works of this time period are the second edition of Wellheiser and Scott’s book An Ounce of Prevention: Integrated Disaster Planning for Archives, Libraries, and Record Centres (Toronto: Canadian Archives Foundation, 2003), Disaster Management for Libraries and Archives by Matthews and Feather (London: Ashgate, 2003), Halstead, Jasper, and Little’s book Disaster Planning: A How-to-Do-It Manual for Librarians (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2005), Corrigan’s 2008 article “Disaster: Response and Recovery at a Major Research Library in New Orleans” (Library Management, 29, no. 4/5), Kahn’s 2012 revision of Disaster Response and Planning for Libraries (Chicago: ALA), and the Heritage Health Index 2004 Summary Report (Heritage Preservation with IMLS). As Diane Brown and Rebecca Hamilton write in chapter 1, “Disaster Management and Continuity Planning: Changes Since the Year 2000,” most disaster plans prior to Katrina “were not sufficient to cope with a disaster of this magnitude… There were no manuals detailing how to work in a situation in which citywide public infrastructure was seriously damaged or non-existent.” Dana Chandler echoes their remarks in chapter 11, “Prepared for Anything and Everything” when he notes that Katrina “highlighted the dearth of information available to libraries and archives regarding the process of rebuilding and repairing collections in response to major disasters.” However, much of the literature about disaster planning has not given close examination to the different types of disasters to befall libraries. It is important to draw a distinction between small-scale disasters, such as a burst pipe, and large-scale disasters, such as a category 5 hurricane. A catastrophic disaster is one on the level of Hurricane Katrina: damage is widespread and total. A naturally occurring disaster is an act of nature (tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes), as opposed to an anthropogenic disaster, which is caused or produced by humans (war, censorship, arson).

When priorities and best practices are laid out beforehand, organizations can better predict how staff will respond. It is also the reason why a dynamic and easily updateable plan is essential to success. In his chapter “After the Flood: Lessons Learned from Small-Scale Disasters,” Gerald Chaudron details how the disaster plan at the McWherter Library at the University of Memphis was robust due to lessons learned from a 1996 flood. However, staff had not had any hands-on training in recovery of materials during the intervening years. When the library experienced a near identical flood in 2014, breakdowns in communication hampered the otherwise commendable efforts of the staff. This is also reflected in chapter 6 “Beyond the Collection: Emergency Planning for Public and Staff Safety.” Jill Dixon and Nancy Abashian recount how Binghamton University Libraries responded to a tornado warning in 2012: staff went outside to hear the siren and were confused on procedure, asking questions such as “Is the library closing?” and “Should we keep people from coming in?” Even though staff had been trained in established procedure, “it was clear that in the moment of this actual emergency, library staff were not clear on what to do or how to do it.”

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The consequences of not planning for a disaster or emergency are all too clear in the empirical literature. Libraries often report that staff react emotionally, are confused, and make poor decisions. Miami University experienced a flood at the Wertz Art and Architecture Library in 2013, as detailed in Ashley Jones’s chapter 18, “Shortcomings and Successes: A Small-Scale Disaster Case Study.” Staff at the library felt panicked and frustrated because of a lack of communication regarding the state of the waterlogged stacks. In chapter 6, Dixon and Abashian explain how training must “focus on retention” as well as frequency in order to combat uncertainty in procedure, as well as keeping staff calm and well informed.

Finally, the literature reflects the overwhelming opinion of disaster planners that disaster awareness and planning is everyone’s responsibility, from the most recently-hired employee to the most senior of administrative staff. The reasons for this are two-fold. First, in a disastrous event, it helps if senior management is included in the training so they understand the costs and commitment involved. Second, a well-trained staff is important in the event that the designated disaster response team is unavailable. The latter was made painfully clear after Katrina, in which many traditional disaster plans failed because they were based on the assumption that a handpicked team would be available to begin the recovery. Shaw reports in chapter 15 that “no one was prepared” for Hurricane Katrina. Many plans had home phone numbers as the only contact information available for staff. When homes are destroyed and staff evacuate, such plans are useless.

By exploring disasters of different scale and devastation, we can begin to develop more complete and efficient disaster plans for our cultural institutions. The chapters herein are laid out in three sections, each revealing a different facet of disaster management and contingency in modern libraries. While these divisions are somewhat artificial, they aid the reader in following an organic experience from before disaster strikes (Making a Plan), to what happens during the disaster (Surviving Disaster), to the moments of reflection and learning that should follow the implementation of any plan (Lessons Learned). Rather than being firm categories, they serve as frameworks that allow the reader to parse what can be an overwhelming amount of information. Many of these chapters, for example, could find homes in two or all three sections of this book.

The chapters in the first section of this book, “Making a Plan,” address the role of contingency planning in libraries and how these processes have changed since the year 2000. These chapters collectively acknowledge the need for service continuity and introduce plans for coordinating emergency responses, steps to take, the creation and revision of disaster plans, and the role of new technologies in enhancing both the library’s and the community’s recovery. Chapters in this section also focus on the need to consider staff safety when creating disaster plans and give due consideration to ways in which libraries can create plans for unforeseen situations.

In the first chapter, “Disaster Management and Continuity Planning in Libraries: Changes Since the Year 2000,” Diane Brown and Rebecca Hamilton describe how libraries have “gone from an emphasis on protecting and restoring collections and facilities to an emphasis on service continuity.” Brown and Hamilton, both from the State Library of Louisiana, have first-hand experience surviving Hurricane Katrina and the effort to rebuild the Gulf Coast. This chapter explores the essential role of the library; not just as a repository of information, but as an important part of community infrastructure.

In chapter 2, “The Incident Command System: Applying Emergency Response Best Practice to Your Disaster,” David Carmicheal describes how the Incident Command System is a perfect example of how a pre-arranged hierarchy of responsibility can mitigate even the most significant of disasters. The Incident Command System “eases coordination between responders” and “creates a common organizational structure that allows responders to organize themselves rapidly.” If everyone in the library is trained to
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respond to an emergency, then more people automatically become available to help. Thus, an integrated and frequent approach to disaster preparedness will increase the chances that someone with appropriate training will be available.

The above ideas are neatly rolled together in chapter 3, “Planning for a Disaster: Creating and Implementing a Disaster Plan.” In this chapter, Jeff and Carmen Cowick introduce new tools (such as mobile apps and cloud computing) to the field of disaster planning, and provide a step-by-step, scalable approach to creating a disaster plan that includes the importance of preparedness and continuous training.

Mary Beth Lock, Craig Fansler, and Meghan Webb describe the difference between an emergency and a disaster in chapter 4, “Emergency Planning (Re)volution: Making a Comprehensive Emergency Plan for the Present and the Future”: “Disasters are events that can be either short or long term, but, being a step removed from emergency, allow for more reaction time and planning and require a longer time to resolve.” This chapter is unique in the literature about disaster planning because of the above distinction, and also because it details how to revise an existing disaster plan to take into account changes since the year 2000.

In chapter 5, “Zen and the Art of Disaster Planning: Collaboration Challenges in Library Disaster Plan Design and Execution,” Alison Verplaetse, Paul Mascareñas, and Kimberly O’Neill use concepts from Zen Buddhism to “illustratively describe the ways in which the numerous pitfalls and challenges faced through the disaster-planning process [are] overcome.”

Jill Dixon and Nancy Abashian describe how staff reaction to a simple tornado warning in 2012 precipitated a complete overhaul of the Binghamton University emergency and safety policies for staff. Chapter 6, “Beyond the Collection: Emergency Planning for Public and Staff Safety,” discusses staff safety as an important part of a disaster plan. In it, Dixon and Abashian emphasize the importance of continuous training for staff, as well as exploring new techniques and policies to keep staff safe during emergency situations.

Many libraries and archives keep collections or items on loan from private collectors or other institutions. How many of us consider the liabilities if those items are damaged during a disaster? Patti Gibbons offers insight into this in chapter 7, “Disaster Management and Exhibition Loans: Contingency Planning for Items on Display.” Gibbons details each step in the process, from reviewing loan requests with attention to disaster protocol to the role of fine art insurance.

Practicing disaster planning as a way of life is often challenging. Allison Galloup experienced this in 2014 when she was charged with creating a comprehensive disaster plan for four separate institutions. In chapter 8, “One Plan, Four Libraries: A Case Study in Disaster Planning for a Four-Campus Academic Institution,” Galloup writes that “our biggest challenge is the idyllic lenses through which some faculty and staff members view the institution… [they] see the development and implementation of a disaster plan as secondary to other policies they deem more important.” Despite the challenge, Galloup goes on to describe a successful disaster plan implementation for four different institutions.

Miranda Nixon returns us to the topic of staff safety in chapter 9, “Safety Doesn’t Happen By Accident: Disaster Planning at the University of Pittsburgh,” a complement to chapter 6. In 2012, staff at the University of Pittsburgh’s Oakland campus dealt with a local shooting and 145 bomb threats. Staff members were much more concerned with personal safety than with “further training or prevention measures for saving on-site physical collection materials,” indicating a strong need for a safety component to the University of Pittsburgh’s disaster plan. Nixon details the process of re-writing the disaster plan for the University of Pittsburgh’s University Library System with staff safety protocol in mind.
Chapters in the next section of the book address water damage, flooding, mold, earthquakes, storms, fires, and other large- and small-scale disasters and offer insight into how libraries can minimalize their own risk of damage resulting from these events. These disasters, both anthropogenic as well as natural in origin, often begin with small issues that, when left unattended to, often result in more serious consequences. Also, problems often arise when spaces not originally intended for libraries and collections become repurposed to these ends. Prevention is frequently more cost-effective than repair, and planning ahead is a good direction for a library to take.

Disaster planning is an ongoing process, based in a sense of personal responsibility. “Reducing identifiable risks boils down time and time again to making a personal commitment to taking action,” writes Randy Silverman, Tomomi Nakashima, Jeffrey M. Hunt, and Joyce Tuia in chapter 10, “A Stitch in Time: Disaster Mitigation Strategies for Cultural Heritage Collections.” They go on to write “Real leadership comes from recognizing opportunities to fold preventive conservation into the daily work so it becomes engrained in institutional culture.” In this chapter, Silverman and his team use case studies to explore preventive techniques to assist in mitigating the effects of fire, flood and earthquake disasters.

While many of the chapters in this volume deal with common disasters (flood, fire, weather, etc.), Dana Chandler explores the uncommon in chapter 11, “Prepared for Anything and Everything: Libraries, Archives and Unexpected Small Scale Disasters.” Of note are his instructions on how to prevent pests such as pigeons, bats, and roaches; what to do when structural integrity is compromised and a building simply falls down; and how to handle faulty furnishings such as chairs, shelves, and even doorknobs.

One of the challenges modern libraries face is the problem of space repurposing. Libraries require unique buildings, but most often budgets and capital improvement projects do not include library buildings. In chapter 12, “Deferred Maintenance and Space Repurposing: The Impact on Libraries and Archives Disaster and Contingency Planning,” disaster planning veterans S. Victor Fleischer and Jo Ann Calzonetti review the twin issues of deferred maintenance and space repurposing, through a case study from the University of Akron.

Though a disaster can be small, such as a burst pipe, the ramifications can be great when a large volume of material is damaged. Whitney Baker describes just such an event in chapter 13, “Responding to High-Volume Water Disasters in the Research Library Context.” Using two case studies from the University of Kansas, Baker gives a detailed account of the recovery effort and the lessons learned from each disaster.

The most common side effect of a water disaster is mold. Mold is a terrible scourge, as it can not only damage materials beyond repair, but it spreads rapidly and poses risks to staff as well as the collections. In chapter 14, “It is Everywhere: Handling a Mold Outbreak in the Library’s High-Density Storage Collection,” Alexis Braun Marks and Eric Owen describe the Eastern Michigan University’s efforts to mitigate the effects of a massive eruption of mold. Braun Marks and Owen give a detailed account, peppered with personal communication, of the outbreak, and include lessons learned and takeaways for other institutions that may deal with the same issue.

Another type of widespread disaster comes under consideration in chapter 15, “Navigating Campus Disasters from Within the Library: Lessons and Implications from Gulf Coast Libraries.” Mahauganee Shaw analyzes the experiences of two university libraries during and after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Shaw gives recommendations along with the case studies to guide disaster management and contingency planning efforts.

Susan Chin gives us one of the first contributions to disaster plan literature on Superstorm Sandy in chapter 16, “Surviving Sandy: Recovering Collections After a Natural Disaster.” In this chapter, Chin
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uses the experience of the New York University Medical Archives to emphasize the importance of having the right tools to mitigate disaster. The right tools include a business continuity plan in addition to a disaster plan, alternatives to solving the unpredictable, and anticipating a long recovery period.

In chapter 17, “After the Flood: Lessons Learned from Small-Scale Disasters,” Gerald Chaudron details how the disaster plan at the McWherter Library at the University of Memphis was robust due to a lessons learned from a 1996 flood. The two case studies and the lessons learned from each provide an excellent example of how continuous staff training can have a beneficial effect on an institution’s ability to mitigate disaster.

Ashley Jones writes about an anthropogenic disaster in chapter 18, “Shortcomings and Successes: A Small-Scale Disaster Case Study.” The Miami University Wertz Art and Architecture Library experienced a flood in 2013 due to human error – mislabeling valves during water system repair. Jones gives extensive details about the incident and the response, including a vigorous solutions and recommendations section.

In chapter 19, “Quality Control and a Method for Drying Out Flooded Archive Holdings: The Case of the Municipal Archives in Barcelona (2013),” conservator Rita Udina reviews the steps involved in disaster intervention after a flood. Udina’s step-by-step account of the flood in one of the repositories of the Barcelona Municipal Archives is expansive and detailed. The practical contents of this chapter will be useful to institutions dealing with a similar disaster.

Together, the chapters in the final section of the book emphasize changes within the library environment as well as ways in which the library has improved in its functionality to its surrounding community. These chapters explore the emotional impacts of disasters on library staff and patrons, and guidance is offered for library staff members who might someday find themselves in the role of curator for a temporary shrine following a traumatic event. The chapters in this section also investigate cause and effect in sustaining digital libraries. Issues in developing nations, however, offer their own obstacles as the authors in this section can attest.

The field of conservation changes every day, driven by new methods of storing and accessing information. In Chapter 20, Valinda Carroll tackles a new topic, “Conservation Since 2000.” This chapter focuses on short-term in situ response techniques, in order to address collections in flux due to disaster. The literature on this topic is sparse, and though responsible conservators wait to try a new technique until there is substantial research on it, “This approach places an even greater burden on conservators to publish their research findings.”

A library’s value to a community in the midst of disaster is overlooked in the literature surrounding disaster planning. However, we have seen libraries stepping in to fulfill the role of emergency services after a major disaster time and time again. In chapter 21, “Library as Lifeboat,” Michael Mabe recounts the Chesterfield Public Library’s efforts to provide stability and infrastructure in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. While the national government concerned itself elsewhere, “little public libraries in and on the edges of the devastation hummed along, providing temporary daytime shelter, information, and basic human aid.”

Of particular interest to the field of disaster planning is conservation in developing countries. In 2012, J. J. Pionke traveled to the National University of Singapore and the Uganda National Archive as a volunteer cataloger. She tells her story in chapter 22, “Disaster is in the Eye of the Beholder.” Pionke noted that in each the potential for disaster was ripe: “Both institutions have unique concerns based on their physical, social, political, and economic environments.”

In a similar vein, Goodluck Ifijeh, Jerome Idigbeyan Ose, Chidi Isiakpona and Julie Ilogho, from Covenant University in Nigeria, write about digital libraries in chapter 23, “Disaster and Digital Librar-
ies in Developing Countries: Issues and Challenges.” As Pionke and Carroll indicate, digital access to materials is a sound method of preservation, but in developing countries, issues and challenges around information and communication technology influence the safety of digital copies. The Covenant University librarians explore these issues and challenges in detail.

Bernadine Goldman discusses a number of small-scale disasters and their impact on communities in chapter 24, “Small-Scale Disasters Have a Lasting Impact on a Public Library, Its Staff, and Community.” Since 2000, the Los Alamos County Library System has experienced two fires and a flood, and each took a toll on the Los Alamos community as well as the library staff. Goldman details the “steps and missteps in the writing of the library’s disaster preparedness manual,” with a special emphasis on the emotional exhaustion experienced by library staff.

Ashley Maynor takes on a particularly significant issue in chapter 25, “Response to the Unthinkable: Collecting & Archiving Condolence Materials Following Public Tragedies.” A familiar sight after a tragedy such as 9/11, the Virginia Tech school shooting, or the bonfire at Texas A&M, are public shrines consisting of flowers, cards, stuffed animals, balloons, etc. Communities gather at the place of trauma to place tangible artifacts of their grief, and those artifacts are collected and memorialized by libraries and archives.

The myriad ways in which we define disaster indicate our inability to predict them, and therefore we will never be able to prevent them. Disasters come in all shapes and descriptions, from emergencies to catastrophes, from an electrical fire to war. We can learn to control how library staff members respond to disasters. If the process of disaster preparedness can be pulled away from a static written plan or a ‘disaster recovery team’ that works in isolation, the profession may stand a better chance at responding to disasters efficiently, effectively, and in force.

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