Disaster Recovery in the Library
Shall We Play a Game?

Disaster planning in libraries often amounts to only an exercise in policy writing. A disaster recovery plan is created and then filed away. The plan may be updated periodically, it may be perused by staff members on occasion, but its contents and practical applications are not discussed at length. While one hopes a disaster would never beset the library, the reality is that a calamity, including water leaks, floods, power failures, insect infestations, and/or mold, could occur at any moment. It is therefore essential that library staff have a firm grip on the techniques that facilitate effective disaster recovery efforts. Library staff must be ready to stand up and deliver when catastrophe strikes. Enter this session.

It is our hope that you will walk away from this session with not only practical takeaways for handling library disasters, but also (and more importantly) a renewed zeal for understanding the nuances of your particular institution’s disaster recovery policy and procedures. We want you to return to your institutions feeling empowered to ask questions about disaster planning.

P.S. The game in its entirety is available for download on Sched. You can use it for staff training at your institutions, your weekly family game night, birthday parties, etc. Enjoy!

Have questions? Contact us!
Othmer Library of Chemical History, Science History Institute
315 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106
215-873-5146
othmeralia@sciencehistory.org
guides.othmerlibrary.sciencehistory.org
Finding running water in the stacks can be both scary and overwhelming. When you are the head of the disaster response team (or just the person around to take care of things), it’s important to remember three things. One, safety first; two, stay calm; and finally, think clearly. This flow chart can help you get moving on your assessment and triage plans. Simply follow the color-coded boxes that fit your disaster and use the text to get you started. Don’t forget to use your disaster plan and rely on the expertise of your co-workers and institutional staff.
Disaster Flow Chart cont.

- **Part A**
  - Industrial (pipes over flowing, fire suppression system discharge, external leaks, sink or toilet backs ups, anything not weather related)
  - Is it safe to be in the area?
  - Can you get building or janitorial services?
  - Can you find the source and stop it?
  - Is the water clear or muddy?
  - Can you slow its progress?
  - Can you get help to stop the flow of water?
  - Can you start to clear the water out?
  - Is the active disaster over?

- **Part B**
  - Natural (weather leaks, flooding, rain related sewer backup, roof breaches, tree damage)
  - Is it safe to be in the building?
  - Can you find the source and stop it?
  - Is the water clear or muddy?
  - Can you slow its progress?
  - Can you get help to stop the flow of water?
  - Can you start to clear the water out?
  - Is the active disaster over?

- **Part C**
  - Assess the damage. Truthfully how bad is it?

- **Part D**
  - Assemble a triage team if needed
  - Get the space declared safe to enter
  - Do a walk through with staff to assess the damage (check all adjacent areas too)
  - Take photos and document the damage for insurance
  - Declare the disaster zone, staging area, and safe spaces
  - Assess the type of damage and materials affected
  - Get a temperature and humidity base reading and check this at regular intervals
  - Gather your supplies
  - Assign recovery roles, prep your team on what to do, and give the tools they need to get to work
  - Work on either lowering the temperature and humidity or keeping it stable at around 65F and 45% RH
  - Keep an eye out for mold and a nose out for musty smells
  - Set up the relocation and/or air-drying space
  - Prepare for moving of materials and relocation of materials
  - Move items on the floor and wettest items first. Then move on to the least wet.
  - Cover up shelving not affected, but be sure to leave air flow
  - Start your air-drying protocol
Disaster Flow Chart

- Part E.
  - Call management and the building engineer
  - If it is safe, do the walk through and document the damage
  - Arrange for a conservator, a consultant or a disaster recovery company to come as soon possible.
  - Get a temperature and humidity base reading and check these readings at regular intervals
  - Work with your team and the professionals to begin the cleanup

- Part F. Air Dry Protocol
  - Arrange the air-drying space, get fans, dehumidifiers, supplies, and triage tables set up
  - Take a base temperature and humidity reading of the space and monitor it
  - Have staff begin to move out the wettest items and/or items on the floor
  - Move items spine side down to prevent text block damage
  - Use book trucks if possible; if not, plastic crates will suffice (if available); if no plastic crates, use cardboard boxes and replace when the boxes are too wet to use
  - Put aside books that are unsalvageable; they still need to be inventoried for a loss report
  - Have some staff moving books, arranging books, and clearing disaster areas as needed
  - If material is being freeze-dried, then have a separate team arranging for that material to be transported
  - Stand books upright and fan open slightly (re-fan and switch orientation as often as possible during the first 48 hours)
  - Remove books from envelopes and dust jackets if possible, dry them separately
  - Make sure you have space between each book
  - If the book’s boards are really wet, then use interleaving absorbent papers between the boards and change them as needed
  - Depending on the amount of water damage, books can take up to two months to dry completely
  - Monitor for mold during the entire process

- Part G
  - Write a full report of the disaster, the recovery, and the post disaster clean up
  - Inventory books damaged, lost, and those that need conservation
  - Discuss the recovery process with staff and make notes of areas that worked and areas in need of improvement
  - Update your disaster recovery plan and arrange for training of new staff

Remember:

Safety first in any disaster.

Be alert and observant of any potential hazards to yourself and your team.
Books:


Websites:

- ALA’s guide on Disaster Response: https://libguides.ala.org/disaster/response
- Concise instructions for water damaged books from the University of Rochester: https://rbscp.lib.rochester.edu/3246

Tools:

- Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel: There is a paper wheel and a phone app was created in partnership with the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training. [Available through the American Institute for Conservation and app stores]