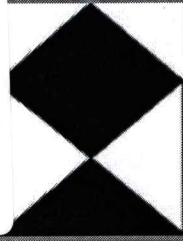


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"Working Towards Saving Cultural Collections"

**NEWSLETTER****MEMBERS**

Canterbury Museum - Cynthia Cripps; Christchurch City Art Gallery - Lynn Campbell; Christchurch City Libraries - Rosemary O'Neill; Lincoln University Library - Graham Penwell; Macmillan Brown Library - Jill Durney; NZ Historic Places Trust Pouhere Taonga - (Pending); RNZAF Museum - Tony Sellwood; University of Canterbury - Roslyme Bell

**Number 31****February 2005****Cynthia Cripps, Editor****Contents**

Notice Regarding Format Change  
Basics of a Disaster/Emergency Plan

**NOTICE REGARDING FORMAT CHANGE**

The CDST Committee members have decided to incorporate a minor change to the biannual newsletters. As of 2005, the February newsletter will now be half the size of the September newsletter which will remain the same length as before.

**BASICS OF A DISASTER/EMERGENCY PLAN**

*(For those who will be attending the 2005 Workshop on developing a disaster plan, this newsletter will be useful preparation.)*

During my experience over the past eight years writing plans for and responding to emergencies in Museums, I have concluded that there are seven basic components to a successful emergency plan. My preference is to use the term emergency rather than disaster, as 'emergency' covers the true range of situations that require a response. An emergency can be anything from the humidity being too high to a full flood. Both situations require a response in order to prevent damage to collections. The term 'disaster' usually brings to mind only the worst possible scenario and can leave staff in heritage institutions unprepared to deal with the smaller scale, but much more common emergencies that also pose a threat to collections.

1. Plan for Creating a Plan

Draw up some basic guidelines about what to do (the following categories in this list are a good start), who will do it and when they will do it by. This helps to provide focus and makes what might seem an overwhelming task a bit more manageable.

2. Risk Identification and Assessment

Brainstorming all potential events that might pose a risk to the collections and then determining how likely they are to occur.

E.g. What events may occur that would result in damage to or loss of the collections? Which of these events are definitely going to happen? Which very unlikely? What is already in place to prevent a situation leading to loss of or damage to the collections (i.e. security procedures, earthquake proofing)? What collections are particularly vulnerable to water/theft/fire/poor environments? Which aren't? Is the collection information (i.e. catalogues) at risk?

Once potential risks have been identified and you have an idea of those likely to happen and those unlikely to happen, this will form the basis of your 'to do' list and the start of your emergency response plan.

3. Resource Identification and Assessment  
Resources to be listed and assessed include people, money and supplies both inside the institution and out in the local and national community. What do you have and what will you need? Who can help?
4. Prioritising  
List the emergency events from the risk assessment in priority order and determine what can be done immediately with what you have. Then assess what is needed to do the remainder. The criteria used to determine where something falls within a priority list will depend on the institution.
5. Communication  
Tell everyone (director, board, staff, volunteers, etc) about the plan, particularly those parts which are likely to affect them directly. A good first step is to inform everyone about who the first point(s) of contact is in the event of an emergency, what constitutes an emergency and what they can do to help.
6. Training Programmes  
Get as many people as possible trained in the various aspects of emergency response (e.g. fire extinguisher use, civil defence, first aid, recovering heritage collections from flood/fire etc). Practical tests are an excellent way to learn more about responding to an emergency. These can be as simple as getting a pile of unwanted books from a second hand store, soaking them with the garden hose, and then trying to recover them.
7. Mitigation and Plan Maintenance  
The best emergency response is to prevent or lessen the amount of damage that can happen if an emergency event occurs. Steps to mitigate these effects can also be incorporated into procedures followed to ensure the plan is reviewed regularly and updated as needed.

It is vital that the structure and makeup of the plan and the response team be customised to suit that particular institution rather than borrowing a plan from someone else and filling in the blanks. That's not to say that reviewing plans from other institutions and having a look at generalized plan templates is a waste of time, as it definitely isn't. But when you do have a look over these documents, do it from the point of view of borrowing parts that will fit your plan rather than copying the entire thing.

In the end, there is no quick fix, silver bullet solution to emergency plans and response. But if you take the time to incorporate planning and response into the 'regular' routine of your institution, the final product will be much more robust and responding to emergencies will be easy.