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## **Disaster Management in College Libraries**

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### **Abstract:**

*Libraries are custodians of information resources. These resources are highly valuable bearing in mind that the collections are usually built over a period of time. By extension, they represent the values and efforts of the library staff, parent institutions and users. The objective of the present study is to ascertain and suggest the roles a librarian & the supporting staff perform during any disaster or emergency. How a disaster can be best managed by pre planning, preparation and preventions. The paper also aims to spread awareness among library professionals in particular for their prospective roles in case of any emergency.*

**Keywords:** Disaster, Disaster Management, Libraries, Information and Communication Technology, Disaster Preventions

### **Introduction:**

“By failing to prepare,  
We are preparing to fail”

-Benjamin Franklin<sup>1</sup>

Prevention is always better than cure; this is also true for libraries. The vitality and relevance of academic libraries are increasingly at risk due to insecurity and visions of ongoing chaos. Faculty and students on/ off campuses expect more from the library due to the growth of information available through the electronic resources. Libraries have very successfully geared themselves to adopt any new technology that is emerging with new innovations every day. Libraries are now functional 24x 7 day and night in a networked world. In the era of www, internet and other technological advancements that have been implemented in library and information centres, the librarians are now facing new challenges in managing the affairs of their institutions in the present scenario of new modes and methods of information bases, new formats of storage, and ever changing information seeking behaviour of the users. Librarian is now working as an information scientist, researcher, educator, psychologist, coordinator, public relations officer and what not. With huge responsibilities on the shoulders of a librarian or the information scientist one has also to safeguard and preserve the variety of precious and invaluable information sources from any disaster or any risk. These disasters – natural, man-made or technical can completely damage the information sources. In fact there is no library in the world that is free from risk. In order to avoid disasters to affect the library and information centre in research institutions, it is necessary to have a disaster management plan. Disaster management is the process of measuring or assessing risk and then developing strategies to manage the risk.

### **Disaster**

A disaster has been defined “is a serious disruption, occurring over a relatively short time, of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental loss and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources”<sup>2</sup>

Anderson and McIntyre refer to a disaster that affects libraries as ‘an unexpected event with destructive consequences to their holdings. It can be a small-scale incident or a full blown emergency, but in either case it requires prompt action to limit damage.’<sup>3</sup>

### Types of Disasters:

When we talk about disasters, the first thing that comes to the mind is the destructive forces of nature. The instances where the equilibrium of the nature is disturbed by unforeseen and uncontrollable events are often treated as disasters. They may be termed as ‘acts of God’ which are literally speaking, beyond the control of humans. At the same time disaster may be the result of a reckless or intentional human act and technical difficulties.

Three main kinds of Disaster-



### Types of Disaster Management

#### 1. Natural Disasters

- Rain/ Precipitation
- Flood /Avalanche
- Cyclone/ Tornado
- Earthquakes and Drought
- Biological Damages
- Micro-organisms, insects or vermin infestation
- Volcanic eruptions
- Cold wave and thunder storms/ Blizzard
- Wildfires
- Heat waves and Mud mud slides
- Air quantity: temperature and humidity, Sinkholes etc.

#### 2. Human/ Man-made Disaster

- Act of War and terrorism
- Fires
- Water (broken pipes, leaking roofs, blocked drains)
- Burglary
- Vandalism
- Arson
- Poor design and quality of the buildings
- Electric short circuits

#### 3. Technical Disaster

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

- Power failure
- Heating the cooling system failure
- Telecommunication failure

### **Disaster Management for Library**

Disaster management plan is a must be incorporated in initial planning of establishing a library. Several smaller pointers for a comprehensive disaster management plan, which are independent of each other but are interlinked, as parts of whole plan are set forth. The disaster and its control mechanism normally go through three stages- before, during and after. All these three stages are kept to be kept in mind while planning to minimise the impact and recover out of potential emergencies. Each disaster plan must cover whole library including staff, readers, sources of information, equipment and infrastructure and it must be a team effort.

### **Components of Disaster plan**

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

1. **List of human resources** - This section should include the names, addresses and telephone numbers of all the members of the disaster team.
2. **Reaction procedures**- A summary of the reaction and evacuation procedures, reaction procedures relevant to different types of disasters, the location of disaster supplies must be indicated.
3. **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. Each type of recovery procedures, for example vacuum-freeze drying, air drying
4. **Equipment and supplies**- Equipments will also be necessary, and the location of this equipment must be indicated if available on the premises. The following are examples of equipment that might be required, wet and dry vacuum cleaners, hand-or battery operated water pumps, fire extinguishers, fans, dehumidifiers, water hoses.
5. **Priority materials**- There should be clear indication of which important and/or rare materials should be evacuated first.
6. **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.
7. **Co-operative arrangements**- The details of co-operative arrangements, which exist to share facilities and services in the event of an emergency
8. **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.
9. **Procedure 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.



### Disaster Prevention

There are some routine activities which should be conducted regularly as preventative measures.

1. **Arrangements for regular building inspections-** the methods of inspection and the frequency between inspections should be indicated. If inspections are carried out by external contractors, then contract names and phone numbers should be provided.
2. **Arrangement 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.
3. **Arrangement 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 members 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.
4. **Technological advancements-** the technological advancements especially in the information and communication sector have provided a real yardstick to warn, prepare, share, respond, quickly to a disaster for minimising its impact and in some cases it is even possible to avoid the damages by a natural disaster. Following technologies can be helpful in the reduction of damage by a disaster.
  - a) **Remote Sensing Technology-** this technique can be read possible threats of any weather disturbances through its weather and other observation satellites. It helps in gathering data by means of radiation from electro-magnetic spectrum.
  - b) **Geographic Information Systems-** this system integrates stores, edits, analyzes, and shares geographically referenced data and is helpful during floods, landslides, earthquakes.
  - c) **WWW and Internet-** it provides a global platform for instant and automatic sharing of information regarding a disaster and its management.
  - d) **Communication Technology-** it is particularly effective in mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Communication technology used to spread and share information relevant during and before any disaster situations, for examples Internet, Fax, Mobile Phones, E-mail, Radio and Television etc.
  - e) **Global Positioning System-** this technology by means of which one can pinpoint the exact place where disaster has struck. The exact damage site then can be visited to start rescue operations. This can be very effective for search and evacuation of displaced people or people buried under debris.
  - f) **Forecasting and Warning System-** this plays a vital role in determining the possible action of a disaster. The potentially affected area can be evacuated and people can be moved to safer places even before the disaster. It is effective for floods, cyclones. Earthquake warning systems is being used these days to warn people against its possible strike.

### Conclusion

In conclusion it can be stated that it is important that all libraries have a formal disaster plan and disaster management procedures. The library and information science curricula also needs to be modified keeping in view the importance of disaster management for library and information centres and above all because libraries world over act as service agencies and librarians as service and information handling managers.

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