

FACTSHEET 4: DRAWING UP A DISASTER PLAN

THIS FACTSHEET RELATES TO QUESTION 3.19 AND 3.20 OF THE MSPI (MUSEUM STANDARDS PROGRAMME FOR IRELAND)

This Factsheet is related to Guidelines 3.19 and 3.20 of the Museum Standards & Programme for Ireland (MSPI). It expands on the Guideline by setting out all aspects to be considered in drafting a disaster plan and outlining a structure to follow.

Introduction

Each museum is a collection unique to itself with its own layout, staffing, opening hours. Therefore only the most general guidelines can be given to help prevent an emergency and then to cope once a disaster has occurred.

For example, is the museum vacated at night or does it have 24 hour security? Are security staff members on duty on each floor or only at the entrance? Is the museum open all year round? If the museum is alarmed, who gets the message - the fire brigade, the nearest Garda station, or a central security firm? Do they know the name and number of the key holder? If the key holder is away, are the emergency services informed of the change and given the name of the new key holder?

There are many different situations and each museum will have to devise its own **disaster plan** appropriate to its own circumstances. There are four key areas to consider when writing it:

1. **Risk Assessment** will identify potential hazards and take steps to **prevent** them occurring.
2. **Disaster Preparedness** ensures that all steps are taken to prepare and equip the museum to handle an emergency. It should include:
 - i) Emergency procedures
 - ii) Evacuation drills and training
 - iii) The formation of a disaster team and emergency contact list
 - iv) The provision of a disaster bin/s
 - v) Prioritisation of the collection for salvage
 - vi) Selection of alternative accommodation
3. **Disaster Response** entails putting procedures in place to allow staff to effectively **respond**, once the alarm goes off, ensuring the safety of public and staff as a priority.
4. **Disaster Salvage** enables effective management of the **salvage** operation once the emergency services have given the 'all clear', to ensure the collections and building are saved.

1. Risk Assessment

Maintenance

Ensure that the building is well maintained to reduce the likelihood of a disaster occurring. If the museum is closed during the winter make sure that it is checked out every 2-4 weeks. If something is amiss get it repaired immediately. Be especially vigilant of water pipes freezing and then bursting, and of leaves blocking drains so that water enters building (see also Standard 3.2 Building Maintenance).

Security

Seek the advice of the Gardaí at an early stage, not only when the museum is at the planning stage, but also when it is operational. There is a crime prevention officer attached to every Garda division in the country who will advise on security. In the case of a new building, or one which is being re-furbished, the divisional officer can call on the back-up services of the National Prevention Unit based in Harcourt Square, Dublin.

Fire prevention

Consult the fire brigade, not only at the planning or refurbishment stage, but also when the museum is operational. Tell them what your concerns are; they will tell you theirs. It is advisable to have a floor plan of the building showing where the services and fire extinguishers are.

Flood

Avoid storing artefacts in basements which may be flooded. If there is no alternative, try to keep them off the ground and ensure your plan includes specific instructions in the event of flooding.

Alarm systems

Make sure that all systems such as emergency lighting, generators, fire detectors, alarms, fire extinguishers, and 'hot' phone lines are checked regularly. Record the results and list the names and phone numbers of the maintenance contractors. When equipment is serviced this should be recorded in the fire log book (see Fire Safety in Places of Assembly - Ease of Escape Regulations 1985). All staff should be trained in the use of fire extinguishers.

2. Disaster Preparedness

Emergency procedures

Draw up a set of procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency. These instructions outline what to do and who to contact in the following situations: a power failure; theft or damage to the building or contents; fire alarm; flood; medical emergency; suspicious parcel, etc. Consult the staff when writing them and provide training and printed copies of the instructions once approved. Carry out an emergency evacuation drill regularly. Assign a member of staff to each floor to ensure that visitors are led to safety. This will mean clearing not only exhibition spaces but theatres, toilets, AV rooms, etc. Select an assembly point at a safe distance from the museum. Make sure that staff are aware of its location and agree an evacuation process to account for everyone.

Emergency procedures: a suggested format

This model can be adapted to fit a range of potential emergencies and can be made specific to the requirements of a particular collection. The most effective Disaster Plans are carefully tailored to suit the institution's size, collection type and staffing levels.

In the event of a Power Failure

- Remain calm
- Unplug computers and other electrical equipment
- Telephone security
- Assist to staff and visitors in your immediate area
- Remain where you are or use a torch to move cautiously towards an area which has emergency lights
- If you are in a lift, stay calm; use the telephone or emergency button
- Stand by for instructions from Security
- If you are asked to evacuate the building leave immediately by the nearest normal

- route
- Go to the assembly point
- Report your presence to the person responsible for accounting for people

Form a disaster team

Appoint someone with overall responsibility to act in an emergency. Make a list of those who should be called in to help (including their phone numbers) and decide what role to assign to each person. Include contact details for all staff, volunteers, conservators, maintenance and service providers, suppliers and key stakeholders. Ensure that everyone on the list is happy to be contacted outside normal office hours in the event of an emergency. Revise the list regularly to ensure it is up to date.

Alternative accommodation for the collection

In the event that it became necessary to evacuate the collection, select suitable alternative accommodation; agree who has authority to decide to evacuate; plan how it will be transported to safety and who will supervise the move. Enquire if there are freeze drying facilities in the area.

Prioritisation of the collection

Make a list of the most important items in the collection, deciding in advance what should be saved as a priority in the event of a disaster. Keep this information secure and, if possible, store a copy off-site. Best practice would aim to have at least the salvage priorities in the collection photographed. This does not require a professional photographer if funds are not available - but remember the commercial value of a good photograph. In the event of theft it will be very useful to give the police a photograph of the stolen object.

Disaster bin

Get a disaster bin and decide on its contents in accordance with the risks you have already identified, for most collections this is water or flood damage. The following items may be included: a first-aid box, mops (string headed), buckets, floor cloths, sponges, polythene, paper towels, Wellington boots, disposable and rubber gloves, fire blankets, protective clothing (helmet, goggles, mask), torches, small tools, wire clippers, blotting paper, acid-free tissue paper, absorbent barriers, freezer paper, newsprint, plastic bags of various sizes to put fragments into, waterproof pens to annotate same, tyvek and tie-on labels, cotton tape and bandages, plastic crates, pencils and clipboards, report forms, camera and film. Essentially, include whatever you think might be useful.

Consider having an amount of petty cash available or financial procedures in place for the purchase of further equipment or sustenance for the team during an emergency.

3. Disaster Response Measures

Having tried to prevent an emergency occurring and ensured that you have worked out how to cope with a disaster, the planned procedures will be put into effect. Remember training is key, there is no point having a very detailed colour coded plan if staff are not trained on its contents and how to respond.

4. Disaster Salvage Procedures

Remember, in an emergency priority will be given to saving life. Obey the instructions of the Gardaí and Fire Brigade. Assuming that they have given the 'all-clear' it will be possible to start trying to rescue the artefacts. This is where the contents of the disaster bins should be useful. Review and revise your procedures regularly, especially if there has been an emergency.

5. Minimum Requirements - checklist

- Check routinely that all the alarm systems, emergency lighting, sprinkler systems, fire extinguishers, telephones are working properly - keep records of when they are tested and by whom
- Ensure that routine maintenance checks on all aspects of the Building/s are carried out and keep records of when and by whom
- Put a procedure in place for the safe storage and availability of all keys
- Consult the Gardaí
- Consult the Fire Brigade
- Have the phone numbers of the emergency services to hand
- Maintain an up to date contact list for any staff, volunteers, conservators, maintenance and service providers, suppliers and key stakeholders you might need to contact in an emergency
- Have an evacuation procedure in place
- Train staff in the use of fire extinguishers
- Have the equipment checked regularly
- Make a list of the procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency
- Arrange alternative storage for the collection in the event of an evacuation
- Get a disaster bin/s and stock with appropriate material and maintain

Useful references and resources:

The National Disaster Response Plan is a formalised arrangement to help heritage collections of national significance in the face of an environmental disaster. The scheme has been generously sponsored by the Council of National Cultural Institutions (CNCI) and is available to any museum, library, archive or cultural collection of national or local significance across the 32 counties.

A number of essential and highly-specialised Disaster Response materials are available to handle water damage and mould remediation in the days immediately after a disaster. This includes water absorbent cushions and dehumidifiers to remove water and moisture from a flood or leak site; heavy duty blotting paper to dry wetted collections as well as essential hand tools and smaller useful items for salvaging mixed collections.

To have access to these materials in the event of an emergency all you need to do is register as a participant of the scheme, there is no charge. You will need to stock your own disaster bin/s though. For more details on how to register please contact the scheme at cnciconservation@gmail.com

Harwell Document Restoration Services is the leading commercial provider of specialist salvage services for the heritage sector the UK and Ireland. You might consider becoming an annual subscriber. Over 800 institutions already subscribe, including most local authorities, each of the UK and Ireland's respective national libraries and archives and many others. www.hdrs.co.uk

Building an Emergency Plan: A Guide for Museums and Other Cultural Institutions Published by The Getty Conservation Institute (1999) The J. Paul Getty Trust, Los Angeles, USA. Available as free download at www.getty.edu/conservation/publications