FACTSHEET 4: DRAWING UP A DISASTER PLAN

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
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

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