



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Grimwade Centre for
Cultural Materials
Conservation

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Disaster preparedness planning is a strategy for preventing disasters and the damage that can result in collections. Being prepared can lessen the impact of a disaster and help to protect collections, buildings and people.

Knowing what to do when you discover a disaster is important, and it starts with disaster preparedness. Disaster preparedness centres around prevention, preparation, response and recovery. The goal is to protect the collections, buildings and people.

There are three stages of disaster management for collections:

- Disaster preparedness
- Disaster prevention
- Disaster response and recovery

WHAT TYPES OF DISASTERS CAN HAPPEN TO COLLECTIONS?

Disasters can be major or minor in scale. It is impossible to foresee all disasters, but some to consider are:

- Water – floods, leaks, and accompanying mould growth that occurs due to increased humidity.
- Fires – and accompanying smoke damage.
- Severe weather and natural disasters – storms, cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis, heatwaves.
- Pest infestation – a pest infestation left unchecked has the potential to devastate collections.
- Theft and vandalism – Opportunistic or premeditated.
- Civil disturbance or a threat – Protests, riots, strikes, etc. May need to increase security, board up vulnerable windows, protect outdoor sculpture, etc.
- Industrial accidents – Accidents from neighbouring establishments could affect your institution.

RESOURCES



Be Prepared - Guidelines for Small Museums for Writing a Disaster Preparedness Plan, Heritage Collections Council, available online:

<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/d4wi>



Caring for your collections: Salvaging water damaged collections, State Library of Queensland, available online:

<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/v4wi>



Part 1: Disaster preparedness and prevention policy, National Library of Australia, available online:

<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/54wi>



Emergency Preparedness for Cultural Institutions: Introduction, Canadian Conservation Institute Notes, available online:

<http://go.unimelb.edu.au/u4wi>

UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS TO YOUR COLLECTION

- Assessing the specific risks to your collection is a critical initial step in the disaster preparedness process.
- If you can anticipate what potential risks your institution is likely to encounter, these can be prepared for and mitigated.
- Review the environment around your building— What disasters have happened in your local area and in your building? What disaster prevention measures are already in place?
- Understand your collection—what is at most risk? What do you consider most significant? Where is it located?
- Undertake a risk assessment—rate the risks according to their probability and impact on your collection.
- Review your risk assessments at the time of any major change, such as renovation or relocation.

DISASTER PREVENTION

- Prevention of disasters where possible is paramount.
- Regular maintenance of the building, facilities and equipment is key to significantly reducing the risk of disasters.
- Implement a maintenance program that regularly reviews plumbing systems and electrical equipment.
- Conduct ongoing, regular checking of the fire alarms, fire extinguishers, fire hoses and sprinkler systems.
- Keeping trees and vegetation cut back from your building and your gutters clear is crucial if your area is affected by a fire season. Place seals around doors, windows and vents and do not operate the HVAC system if there is a risk of fire or smoke in the area. Liaise with the local fire department about how to prepare your property best.
- Staff and volunteers should be trained to identify hazards that may cause a disaster and how to report them. Staff should be familiar with the disaster plan and how to implement it in the event of a disaster.
- Staff should be trained in the use of fire extinguishers and be familiar with the equipment inside the disaster bins.

FURTHER STEPS

- Write a comprehensive disaster plan (see *DISASTER PLAN Fact Sheet*)
- Have a well-stocked disaster bin (see *DISASTER BIN Fact Sheet*)