



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Grimwade Centre for
Cultural Materials
Conservation



DISASTER PLAN

A Disaster Plan is a set of written policies and procedures for people to follow during a disaster that is specific to your institution. Having a Disaster Plan in place can prevent an emergency from becoming a catastrophe.

Before a disaster happens, it is important to prepare a Disaster Plan and train your team to know what to do during and after a disaster.

A Disaster Plan includes information about what to do, where significant items are located and who to contact for assistance with recovery.

It is important to note that the priority in any collection disaster situation is always human life, safety and wellbeing. Always follow the advice of emergency services.

As well as your onsite copies, keep a physical copy of your disaster plan offsite and have a virtual copy stored also.

Your evacuation procedures and business continuity plan should inform but be separate from your collection Disaster Plan.

AIMS OF A DISASTER PLAN

- Equip staff and volunteers with the knowledge and skills to safely respond to risks to the collection material.
- Eliminate or mitigate risks that threaten the collection.
- Facilitate salvage and recovery operations to minimise the physical, financial and reputational impact, allowing the institution to resume normal services as soon as possible.

A Disaster Plan should be:

- Simple to follow
- Succinct
- Accessible
- Flexible
- Disseminated to relevant staff and volunteers, so people know their role in a disaster situation

A Disaster Plan should include:

- Steps on how to effectively respond to various disasters—minor incident to large scale disaster
- Item recovery team – will be dedicated to securing your collection during a disaster.
- Identifying key role positions (see below).
- Emergency contacts - this includes institution/organisation staff and volunteer contact details and also emergency crews – fire, ambulance, and state emergency services.
- Floor plans
- Safety checklist
- Salvage procedures
- Priority salvage lists
- Contact details for relevant suppliers of salvage materials and equipment
- Disaster bin locations

Disaster Plan Key roles:

Key roles to fill for your disaster planning include:

- Health and safety officer – in charge of OH&S.
- Checking and maintaining building.
- Assessing and stock taking of collection.
- Preparation and stock take of disaster bin.

WRITING THE DISASTER PLAN

- Set time aside to create and maintain your plan.
- Do not leave the task of creating and managing your Disaster Plan up to one individual; it should be a shared responsibility.

- Create a small team that takes charge of disaster preparedness. Encourage people from different areas of the institution to be involved; this will empower a range of staff to respond to a disaster. This team will be responsible for disseminating relevant information to all staff and volunteers.

MAINTAINING THE DISASTER PLAN

- Update and review the plan every three years or immediately after a disaster.
- Undertake regular drills for staff and volunteers to keep information fresh and relevant.

DISASTER RESPONSE

- A disaster team includes staff and emergency services.
- Build a relationship with your local emergency responders and let them know what your collection consists of and how it is displayed and stored. This can help them to approach a future disaster strategically to avoid causing further damage.
- You should contact your local fire department to arrange a visit so they can develop a plan which can prevent unnecessary damage to important works in the event of a fire. They may also offer input on avoiding disaster scenarios and will let you know when potentially hazardous situations arise.
- Your wider disaster response team might also include people or organisations in your local area who can assist and resources in the event of a disaster, such as other cultural institutions or businesses with a large freezer capacity.

- Have a list of approved experts and services on hand, such as conservators, heating/cooling rental companies, and storage facilities.

DISASTER RECOVERY

- The Disaster Plan outlines the key steps for the recovery of collection material.
- Training staff, so they have the tools to perform systematically and confidently in a collection salvage situation is important.
- Priority salvage lists of significant objects, including photographs and their locations, can be beneficial if salvage time is limited or if familiar staff are not doing the salvage.
- Access for collection staff may only be permitted after the disaster has occurred and authorities deem the site safe to re-enter.
- If possible, advice should be sought from a conservator before undertaking any salvage activity.
- Many items can be repaired following significant damage, so do not presume an item is unsalvageable without consulting an appropriate conservator.
- Salvage steps for a range of material types can be found in Be Prepared. See additional resources below.

A disaster plan is supported by a disaster bin. It holds items that are to be used for the clean-up and recovery in the event of a disaster (see *DISASTER BIN Fact Sheet*).

RESOURCES



Be Prepared - Guidelines for Small Museums for Writing a Disaster Preparedness Plan, Heritage Collections Council, available online: <http://go.unimelb.edu.au/d4wi>



Emergency Preparedness for Cultural Institutions: Introduction, Canadian Conservation Institute Notes, available online: <http://go.unimelb.edu.au/u4wi>



Preservation Advisory Centre – Salvage, British Library, available online: <http://go.unimelb.edu.au/y4wi>



Disaster Response and Recovery Guides, American Institute for Conservation, available online: <http://go.unimelb.edu.au/b4wi>