#### DISASTER PREPAREDNESS - EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PROGRAM

"Preparing and Protecting our Community"

## **Emergency Response Action Steps For The First 48**

The first 48 hours of a disaster can make the difference.

### **DISASTER ALERT:** If you have advanced warning:

- People come first. Provide assistance. Note needs of people with disabilities.
- Move or secure vital records/high priority items if it can be done safely.
- Screw plywood over windows or use tape to reduce shattering.

  (Please Note: Taping windows to prevent flying glass is not a recommended practice.)
- Verify master switch shut-off (water, gas, electricity) by trained staff.
- Move items away from windows and below-ground storage into water-resistant areas:
  - o Flooding: move items to higher floors.
  - o Hurricane: avoid areas under roof.
- Wrap shelves, cabinets, other storage units in heavy plastic sealed with waterproof tape.
- Move outdoor objects indoors or secure.
- Take with you lists of staff, institutional/public officials, insurance and financial data, inventory, emergency plan and supplies.
- Appoint a staff contact to give instructions on returning to work.

### **SAFETY FIRST!**

- Remain calm, reassuring. Alert staff to potential hazards.
- Look for loose or downed power lines. Avoid area. Report problems to local utility.
- Look for electrical system damage: sparks, broken/frayed wires, smell of burning insulation. Turn off electricity at main switch if you can without risk.
- Shut off water.
- If you smell gas or hear blowing or hissing, open a window and immediately leave the building. Turn off gas at main valve if trained to do so; call the gas company at once.
- DO NOT REENTER THE BUILDING until declared safe by security or emergency management officials.

#### **GETTING STARTED OFF SITE**

- Gather staff off-site to assign tasks and review salvage priorities. Create a team big enough for the work.
- Establish a "Command Center" with office equipment (computers, photocopier) and communications tools (walkie-talkies, cellular phones).
- Create a secure salvage area with locks, fans, tables, shelves, plastic sheeting, drying materials and clean water.
- Notify emergency officials of the extent of damage. Contact peer institutions or professional groups for help.
- Appoint a media liaison to report conditions and need for help/volunteers. You may have to limit access to collections.

#### DISASTER PREPAREDNESS - EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PROGRAM

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- Verify financial resources: amount and terms of insurance, government assistance, potential outside funding.
- Contact service providers for generator, freezer, drying or freeze-drying services and refrigerated trucking.
- Arrange for repairs to security system.

### STABILIZE THE BUILDING & ENVIRONMENT

- Some building contents may be contaminated. Do not enter without current tetanus shots, protective gloves/clothing, hard hat and NIOSH-approved respiratory mask.
- Identify and repair structural hazards. Brace shelves. Remove debris from floor.
- Reduce temperature and relative humidity at once to prevent mold outbreak. Ideal targets are less than  $70^{\circ}$  F/45% RH.
- If warm outside, use coldest air conditioning setting; cover broken windows with plastic.
- In cool, low-humidity weather open all windows, use circulating fans. If mold is already present, do not circulate air.
- Do not turn on heat unless required for human comfort.
- Remove standing water and empty items containing water; remove wet carpets and furnishings.
- If everything is soaked, use commercial dehumidification except in historic buildings.
- Purchase needed supplies.

#### **DOCUMENTATION**

- Once it is safe to enter the building, make a preliminary tour of all affected areas. Wear protective clothing.
- Do not move objects or collections without documenting their condition.
- Use a Polaroid-type camera or video camera to record conditions of collections and structure. Make sure images clearly record damage. Supplement with better quality photos when necessary.
- Make notes and voice recordings to accompany photographs.
- Assign staff to keep written records of contacts with insurance agents and other investigators, and staff decisions on retrieval and salvage.
- Make visual, written and voice records for each step of salvage procedures.

### **RETRIEVAL & PROTECTION**

- Leave undamaged items in place if the environment is stable and area secure. If not, move them to a secure, environmentally controlled area.
- If no part of the building is dry, protect all objects with loose plastic sheeting.
- When moving collections, give priority to undamaged items and those on-loan. Separate undamaged from damaged items.
- Until salvage begins, maintain each group in the same condition you found it; i.e., keep wet items wet, dry items dry, and damp items damp.

#### DISASTER PREPAREDNESS - EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PROGRAM

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- Retrieve all pieces of broken objects and label them.
- Check items daily for mold. If mold is found, handle objects with extreme care and isolate them.

## **DAMAGE ASSESSMENT**

- Notify insurance representative or risk manager. You may need an on-site evaluation before taking action.
- Make a rough estimate of the type of materials affected and the extent and nature of damage. A detailed evaluation can slow recovery now.
- Look for threats to worker safety or collections. Determine status of security systems.
- Look for evidence of mold. Note how long the materials have been wet and the current inside temperature and relative humidity.
- SEE DOCUMENTATION SECTION. Documenting the damage is essential for insurance and will help you with recovery.

#### **SALVAGE PRIORITIES**

Establish salvage priorities by groups of materials, not item-by-item. A library might use subject areas or call numbers; an archive, record group; and a museum, material group.

Focus first protection efforts and salvage work on:

- 1. Vital institutional information; employee and accounting records, accession lists, shelf list and database backups.
- 2. Items on loan from individuals or other institutions.
- 3. Collections that most directly support the institution's mission.
- 4. Collections that are unique, most used, most vital for research, most representative of subject areas, least replaceable or most valuable.
- 5. Items most prone to continued damage if untreated.
- 6. Materials most likely to be successfully salvaged.

## **HISTORIC BUILDINGS: General Tips**

- Contact architectural conservators, historic preservation agencies, FEMA, and/or structural engineers before cleanup, especially for buildings on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Treatment of Historic Properties (pp.17-59).
- Remove standing water from basement and crawl spaces. Contact a structural engineer before pumping water; pumping can collapse foundation when groundwater is high.
- Remove flood-soaked insulation, wallboard and non-historic wall coverings. Support loose plaster with plywood and wood "T" braces.
- Clean historic elements first. Use non-abrasive household cleansers.



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- If you treat non-historic features, do not harm historic elements.
- Inventory found items, loose decorative elements, furnishings and collections. Save for reuse or as restoration models.
- Air dry with good ventilation. Never use systems that pump in super-dry air.