

# **Catholic Archives Society Publications**

## **Archive Advice Leaflet number 12**

### **Basic Disaster Planning**

#### **Introduction**

Disaster planning is an often overlooked essential for archival repositories. Knowing what to do in the event of an emergency, and responding effectively and promptly, will allow your library and archive to recover and begin to function again more quickly. This paper will focus on the essentials of disaster planning on a budget for small repositories like monastic communities. Your response to a disaster will have a great effect on the recovery, so it is essential to have a plan of action in place and to practise what to do regularly.

Initially, you should identify the core records of the collection, those which you simply cannot function without. These may include registers of the community – profession registers, death registers, lists of current members of the community and their roles. Title deeds and legal documents are often very important, proof of ownership of the site on which your building stands and your legal right to inhabit it. Electronic records are incredibly prevalent, and should be backed up regularly. Where possible, you should keep copies of your core records somewhere safe off-site.

#### **Writing your disaster plan**

Before writing your disaster plan, you should walk around your building and ascertain the potential risks – these can include water pipes, drains and heaters. You should also consider who has access to your library and archives. If you allow members of the public into your library and archives, you will need to consider a procedure for evacuation, and regrettably, theft. This should be discussed with your insurers. The main risks you are likely to face are flood, fire and theft, but you should also be aware of other possible threats like gas explosions and terrorist attacks. All of this is, understandably, rather unnerving but it is important to be aware of the worst-case scenarios so you are able to react in the most effective way. A written procedure to which you can refer should give you step by step actions to manage the disaster.

## Disaster kit

A disaster kit is useful for providing support for the first response to an event. It consists of a box of essential equipment for packaging, and basic cleaning during and after a disaster. The disaster kit should be placed somewhere easily accessible in the event of a disaster in the archive or library. Commercial disaster kits are available from places like Pelaw Packaging but these are expensive and may be too generic for your repository. Although they contain some specialised equipment, they are designed for large archival buildings like county council record offices or university archives. It is very easy to create your own disaster kit from materials available commercially in shops like Homebase or B&Q, and an example of this can be found in appendix 1. The essentials for a disaster kit are as follows:

- Protective clothing for the clean-up team, including face masks and disposable gloves
- Protective packaging for rescued books and archives and boxes to hold damaged items.
- A written copy of the disaster plan with clear instructions for reacting to the situation
- A camera or phone to document the event – this can also have an effect on claiming on your insurance.
- An accident book – all incidents, including near misses, should be recorded

You should make a list of first responders who will act in the event of a disaster. These people should be based close by, or on-site if possible in the case of a religious community. On this list should be names and contact details and, ideally, a role for each person. It is impossible to predict how individuals will react to a disaster, and so having one person to take charge and co-ordinate a group response is important. As well as people to assist on the ground, you should list your insurers, local or preferred plumber/electrician/handyman, and suppliers of packaging equipment.

Depending on the size and nature of the disaster, the emergency services may or may not be called in to assist. Do not put yourself in danger, and do not attempt to re-enter a building until you have been told it is safe to do so. If possible, speak with your local emergency services personnel at a quiet time and show them your disaster plan. If you are struggling to write a disaster plan in the first place, they will often be able to offer advice to get you started.

The most common disasters are fire and flood, and both of these will involve water at some point, either from the cause of the flood or from fire hoses. Mould can form and spread incredibly quickly, so it is important to wear protective clothing and to work quickly. Wrap books in blotting paper and stack them spine down in plastic boxes.

### **Professional Help**

If your community is able to afford a contract with a professional disaster response company, such as Harwell Document Restoration Services, they will be able to provide quick and effective assistance and treatment of documents damaged by water or smoke.

Alternatively, it would be worth getting in touch with your local county record office. The majority have a conservator based on site and they may be willing to offer professional advice and support with regard to cleaning up after a disaster.

### **Theft**

It is more difficult to deal with theft of library and archive material but you should attempt to maintain a basic list of what is in your building and keep a record of items borrowed from the library. If you allow members of the public into your library, they should be supervised. The library and archives should be kept locked when it is not in use.

You should install an intruder alarm and set it out of hours. Basic alarms can be purchased from hardware shops like Homebase for a reasonable price, and can act as a deterrent to potential thieves as well as an alert for the community. If you are able to afford a more sophisticated system, it can be used to contact a number of people all at once, or even the police. Should you decide for an alarm to call the police, you will need to inform them and make arrangements for call-outs and false alarms.

### **After a disaster**

You should review your disaster plan annually and test your evacuation procedure regularly.

## References

Tamara Thornhill, *Disaster Planning*. Catholic Archives Society Occasional Paper. 2011.

National Archives *Disaster Planning and Risk Management* -  
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/disaster-planning-risk-management.pdf>

National Preservation Office – *Basic Preservation Guidelines for Library and Archive Collections* - <http://www.collectionstrust.org.uk/media/documents/c1/a92/f6/000047.pdf>

## Appendix 1 - Disaster kit compiled mostly from high street hardware shops.

Costs are approximate but this adds up to about £140.

- Plastic sheeting - <http://www.homebase.co.uk/en/homebaseuk/heavy-duty-polythene-sheet---3-x-4m-622898> £10
- Plastic gloves and booties - <http://www.homebase.co.uk/en/homebaseuk/spontex-multi-purpose-disposable-gloves-100pk-267185> £5 and <http://www.homebase.co.uk/en/homebaseuk/draper-45842-disposable-overshoe-covers---box-of-100-316812> £10
- Aprons or boiler suits - [http://pel.eu/Store/Products/Disaster-\\$4-Cleaning/Just\\$9In\\$9Case/Disposable-Aprons](http://pel.eu/Store/Products/Disaster-$4-Cleaning/Just$9In$9Case/Disposable-Aprons) £6
- Masks - <http://www.homebase.co.uk/en/homebaseuk/homebase-comfort-mask---3-pack-100726> £3
- Stackable boxes with lids - <http://www.homebase.co.uk/en/homebaseuk/40-litre-black-crocodile-lid-storage-boxes---set-of-4-142686> £20
- Torches - <http://www.homebase.co.uk/en/homebaseuk/wind-up-black-pocket-torch-106349> £2
- Absorbent cloths and blotting paper – <http://www.homebase.co.uk/en/homebaseuk/all-purpose-cloths---25-pack-856668> £3 and <http://www.viking-direct.co.uk/a/pb/Blotting-Paper-White-445-x-570mm-140gsm/id=ND182281/> £20
- Folders for wet books - <http://www.gresswell.co.uk/archive-envelopes.html> £40
- Marker pen - <http://www.homebase.co.uk/en/homebaseuk/marker-pen-586320> £2 or [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Chinagraph-Pencils-Pack-Black-Anything/dp/B00EPQSQ1A/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=officeproduct&ie=UTF8&qid=1436432778&sr=1-1&keywords=Chinagraph](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Chinagraph-Pencils-Pack-Black-Anything/dp/B00EPQSQ1A/ref=sr_1_1?s=officeproduct&ie=UTF8&qid=1436432778&sr=1-1&keywords=Chinagraph) £4
- Scissors or knife - <http://www.homebase.co.uk/en/homebaseuk/scissors-3-pack-296807> £5
- Gaffer tape - <http://www.homebase.co.uk/en/homebaseuk/decorating/sealants-filler-and-strippers/duck-ultimate-cloth-tape---black---50-x-25-069715> £10
- Hazard tape - [http://pel.eu/Store/Products/Disaster-\\$4-Cleaning/Just\\$9In\\$9Case/Barricade-Tape](http://pel.eu/Store/Products/Disaster-$4-Cleaning/Just$9In$9Case/Barricade-Tape) £6

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