

Disaster Preparedness and Recovery for Records for Agencies of the Northern Territory Government

- Be Prepared...
- Make a Plan...
- Protection
- Response
- Rehabilitation

Building Rehabilitation objectives are to render the building safe and functional. Structural damage must be repaired, debris and dirt cleared away, and collection and working spaces cleared out, so salvaging can take place efficiently. It is very important to ensure that the building's air-conditioning and ventilating systems are working in order to maintain control of the environment.

After the initial salvage work has been completed and the affected parts of the collection are safely dried or frozen, much work still remains to be done. The damaged materials will need to be cleaned, repaired, re-housed, and returned to shelves/compactus/filing cabinets. The rehabilitation of damaged records begins with sorting and assigning priorities; treatment of damaged materials; cleaning files/items; repair and re-covering of documents if necessary. The relative recovery cost of different conservation treatment options may also need to be considered.

In a major natural disaster, procedures issued by the appropriate authority should be adhered to. Having a records disaster plan enables quick identification of essential, priority records to ensure the ongoing business of the agency - but of course human life comes first and takes priority over all else.

Having a plan in place before a disaster occurs is the best insurance against losing vital information and vital time.

For any further assistance in designing or implementing a records disaster plan please contact the Northern Territory Archives Service.

Are You Prepared???

Be Prepared...

A records disaster encompasses all types of damage to information/records (in whatever format) on a large or small scale. It may be caused by natural occurrence such as flood, fire, cyclone etc or from an internal hazard like leaking pipes, electrical fault or even an inadequate air conditioning system. What ever the reason, being prepared for a disaster is essential. When reaction to a disaster is prompt and efficient the effects can be minimised. Being organised and aware of procedures enhances the likelihood

of full recovery. Having a plan in place before a disaster occurs is the best insurance against losing vital information.

Make a Plan...

A disaster plan needs to address all aspects of emergency preparedness from prevention, protection and response to recovery and rehabilitation. Prevention includes: documenting and regularly inspecting interior and exterior hazards to the building and collection; regular maintenance of building and equipment; proper housekeeping and environmental control. Protection includes: installation of alarms, fire suppression systems; establishment of basic building security measures; assembly of emergency supply kits; and the organisation of an in-house disaster response team. Response includes: the actions which are to be taken after the first encounter with the damaged records.

Rehabilitation and Recovery include: steps taken to deal with the disaster over a longer term. This may include the help of outside expertise and advice. Assigning priorities for protection and salvage of various parts of the record collection is a very important part of disaster planning. When priorities are established ahead of time, decisions can be made rationally as to which files or record series are to be protected or salvaged first, second and so on. Collection priorities marked on a floor plan will show the necessary information at a glance or files/series/boxes can be marked with colour coded stickers i.e.: red for high priority etc.

Factors to consider when assigning priorities:

- whether the records are essential to the ongoing business of the agency;
- can they be replaced, either in similar or different format such as microfilm;
- the long term repercussions in the event of loss of the information/record/series;
- the value of the records for reference and research to agency, community, territory or nationally.

Protection

Emergency Supply Kits are established to ensure the protection of the records. Emergency supply kits should be able to meet immediate needs following a disaster. They should be periodically updated to ensure that all items are in working order, i.e.: batteries in torches. The kits need to be stored in an easily accessible location, preferably close to where disasters are most likely to occur.

The following are basic supplies which constitute the minimum for preparedness to meet emergencies: Plastic boxes for packing wet files; brooms; mops; buckets; extension cords; flashlights and batteries; rubber gloves; paper towels or unprinted newsprint; scissors and/or retractable

knives etc; water proof masking tape; water proof marking pens; pens and paper for documentation; plastic garbage bags and heavy duty plastic sheeting used to protect shelving, compactus, furniture etc.

Response

In responding to a disaster, scale is an important consideration since the size of an emergency determines in many ways what needs to be done. Definitions of disaster scope vary, and include types of disaster and degree of damage and what is affected. The three tier system of assessment is useful for quick analysis. Suggested numerical guidelines for categories:

- small: up to 500 files/items affected moderate: over 500 files/items affected
- large: over 1,000 files/items affected.

Once the scale of disaster has been determined, the disaster team will have a basis for decisions, and a starting point for consultation with outside sources of assistance if required.

Once it is safe to enter the disaster area, the disaster team will: stabilise the environment; sort damaged materials; implement on-the-spot training of volunteers if necessary; and implement salvaging techniques. Of course the in-house response team has been trained in all these aspects prior to the emergency!

Rehabilitation

After a disaster, especially a large-scale one, the primary goal for rehabilitation is to stabilise the environment. This is done by bringing the building's interior conditions to within acceptable limits, and being able to maintain those conditions. Both temperature and relative humidity must be kept low if mould growth is to be prevented. But humidity is the key factor, for mould will grow even in low temperatures where the relative humidity is above 65%