

Are Disaster and Emergency Plans Truly Complete?

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Introduction

Planning for unanticipated disasters can be a very formidable and daunting task for most individuals and organizations. Decision makers and emergency managers and coordinators, through an informed committee and a well-organized plan, play a critical role in lessening the consequences of a disaster. But are these plans truly comprehensive or complete?

A comprehensive disaster plan represents an important aspect of overall planning in any organization, and libraries and archives are no exception. Libraries and archives continue to make every effort to protect their collections, and provide continued services to their clients/stakeholders. Kostagiolas, et al. (2011) noted that:

for years, library and information academics and professionals are highly concerned about the issues of risk and disaster that threaten libraries and information services due to a wide number of man-made and natural causes... this awareness is gradually shifting from reactive measures to proactive ones.

The authors concluded that the level of disaster preparedness in libraries in many countries is quite high for normal activities, e.g., training, equipment, and building preventative maintenance (Kostagiolas, et al., 2011). However the procedures for protecting the collections and institutional assets cannot be implemented without a disaster committee that has clear and concise roles, duties and responsibilities (RDRs). These RDRs should be documented for all the disaster committee's members and other persons who are responsible for specific functions. Ideally the members of the committee should be rotated so that everyone will be exposed to or have the opportunity to understand the processes and the responsibilities that are associated with disaster and emergency management. In addition, rotation will help to ensure the continued sustainability of the process. The size of any disaster committee will reflect the size of the institution, as well as the nature of its holdings and assets.

It is always the effort of any institution to prevent a disaster from occurring, hence the need for each person on the disaster committee to know their specific RDRs. This can only be achieved through a well-documented, clear and logical list of duties assigned to each person, or teams of persons, who make up the committee. These assigned RDRs become obvious only in the event

of a disaster but should be considered from the inception of the disaster committee and the writing of the plan; they will also be used for orientation, training and succession planning.

A disaster plan goes through several revisions to reflect currency. Similarly it is essential that persons who form the disaster team have their RDRs examined periodically. The composition of the team will change over time, so there will always be a need for training and re-training members. New members of the team will benefit from the documented RDRs as this will provide a tool for training, orientation, guidance, leadership, sustainability of the disaster committee, and succession planning. The agreed-to, established RDRs will also contribute to the continued existence of the institution's disaster manual or plan.

The purpose of this paper is to provide examples of the RDRs of various members of disaster management committee to be used

1. As a guide for institutions that either have a disaster plan or manual but do not have well-documented RDRs, or are considering writing their disaster plan for the first time.
2. To justify the need to move beyond a basic plan to include a section that lists the responsibilities and accountabilities for specific areas of the disaster and emergency management process. This section is critical because the absence of documented RDRs means that the plan is incomplete.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach and employed a content analysis to gather in-depth data to examine disaster and emergency plans from varying institutions. The criteria for selection in the study was that the organizations had to have a documented disaster or emergency plan that was available either electronically or in print irrespective of its location. A case study approach was selected to examine the institutions. Content/document analysis used in this study consisted of academic articles, unpublished documents ranging from print to websites on the Internet, and those available only in print format. The research is based on secondary data as a search was done on the Internet and in electronic databases. A number of institutions were personally contacted. There was some difficulty in accessing some of the disaster plans that were not available electronically as distance made it impossible to access them. The population included public, academic and school libraries, archives, records centers and a number of private and public corporations.

Findings

A large number of the documents/literature examined revealed that there were varying degrees in the level of the disaster and emergency manuals ranging from simple to complex. However, only a few have sections that have a comprehensive listing of RDRs.

Review of Literature

Terms and Definitions

There is a plethora of published and unpublished literature related to disaster management dating back to the 1980s. Beggan (2011) notes that the subject matter is intertwined in a multi-discipline approach bringing together scholars from public management, public policy and economics to organizational crisis management. A number of terms are used interchangeably in the literature, including disaster planning, disaster control planning and emergency or contingency planning (Muir & Shenton, 2002). Muir and Shenton further note that the term risk management has also become fashionable. From the numerous definitions used for disaster management, the authors have identified two that almost capture the concept that is relevant for this research. Lyall (1996) defines a disaster plan as “a document which describes the procedures devised to prevent and prepare for disaster, and those proposed to respond to recover from disaster when they occur.” Mathew and Eden (1996) state that their understanding of disaster management includes much more than the formulation of a written disaster control plan: it encompasses broader management issues such as finance, risk management and training. The authors of this paper however would add the documentation of RDRs of all parties involved in the management of any disaster to the definitions of Lyall (1996) and Matthew & Eden (1996).

Role of Management

Numerous articles have been published on disaster planning, preparedness and management in various organizations in both developing and developed countries. There is a common emphasis in most of the literature on the need for a high level of accountability and a commitment to the process from the highest level of the organization. Wold (1997) expressed the notion that top management must support and be involved in the development of the disaster recovery and planning process. He further implied that the management team should be responsible for coordinating and ensuring its effectiveness within the organization. Hence, the first step in the process is to ensure that the senior management in the organization supports and is committed to the entire process. Therefore the highest level of responsibility and accountability rests with the head of the organization that may or may not be a member of the

team but will delegate the responsibility and accountability for the process to the disaster coordinator. The head, however, will maintain close monitoring and supervision to ensure the full compliance of the committee in the execution of their RDRs. Rike (2003) and Patkus and Motylewski (1993) have explained that management must be accountable for supporting, coordinating, and delegating the responsibility for developing the disaster preparedness and recovery plan as well as implementing and maintaining it. Top management should review and approve the proposed plan and any changes to it before the official plan is formalized (Rike, 2003) and must be prepared to commit the needed time and resources, both financial and human.

The Disaster Committee

Bolger (2003) points out that in assigning responsibility, the disaster team must be composed of participants from a range of library backgrounds, such as special collections and collection development (Bolger, 2003). She further notes that other personnel in the organization, such as security and maintenance staff, should be made members of the team (Bolger, 2003).

Matthews and Eden (1996) also support the view that disaster control plans must be managed and that the persons who are responsible need to liaise with representatives inside and outside of the organization, such as firemen, binders, and salvage experts. They also recognize that persons who are charged with responsibility for the management of the process must be of a high quality.

Rike (2003) further explains that the planning process will need leaders. A disaster committee should include representatives from all functional areas in the organization. Some key persons would include, among others, the disaster coordinator, the recovery coordinator, the first aid coordinator, the public relations coordinator, and the information technology coordinator. The disaster coordinator is designated the head of the disaster committee who has both specific and general duties and responsibilities. This committee includes other persons who also have levels of accountability, duties and responsibility depending on their role and functions. Each individual or group has the critical responsibility and accountability for taking precautionary measures to protect the institution's records, collections and assets against loss or damage as, in the event of any disaster, ultimate responsibility rests with the head of the organization. Similarly, when a disaster occurs, persons who have been assigned specific RDRs will perform and participate in the recovery and/or restoration exercise. However, the disaster coordinator/disaster team leader (the terms are used interchangeably in the literature) assigns different levels of accountability and responsibility to the various teams or individuals depending

on the size of the institution. Rike (2003) supported the view that responsibilities should be assigned to appropriate teams for each functional area of the organization.

Members of the team in turn provide leadership in the form of guidance, knowledge, displaying responsibility, and accountability to ensure that all the staff members are appropriately informed, trained, and provided with the necessary supplies to execute their duties effectively in the event of a disaster. Those responsible must understand and be able to execute the plan, perform protection duties and recovery, and possibly perform salvage tasks for their area of responsibility (Rike, 2003).

Patkus and Motylewski (1993) highlighted the importance of the decision of who will be responsible for the various activities when responding to an emergency. This statement suggests that each person's duties and responsibilities must be clear and specific so as not to have chaos at the time of a disaster. It also indicates that accountability rests with an individual or a committee. However it is obvious from the literature, as well as from accessible disaster manuals and recovery plans, that there is a lack of comprehensive reference for duties and responsibilities of all members of the disaster committee. What is normally recommended and available in abundance is information on the RDRs of the disaster committee and the disaster coordinator or disaster team leader in general but not the specific individuals on the committee. When there is mention of the RDRs of persons on the disaster committee, it is normally no more than two sentences highlighting what is expected of the persons who occupy important positions on the committee.

The Disaster and Emergency Plan

Bolger (2003) addresses assigning responsibility when formulating the disaster plan. There have been countless workshops that have focused on disaster planning and all its relevant areas, such as the planning cycle, writing the plan, and establishing the committee. However, there has not been much focus on the details of committee members' RDRs. Similarly, the literature surveyed, as well as the examination of several disaster plans or disaster recovery plans from libraries also lack such details. Despite their ongoing effort, some libraries are still far from having exhaustive disaster plans or disaster recovery plans but many of them do not include the section that deals with the RDRs. Institutions that have comprehensive plans that list RDRs of their committee members include: Cornell University, Illinois Institute of Technology, The University of The West Indies (Mona Campus), The National Library of Australia, Bucknell University, and Colorado State University. Hence, varying degrees and levels of responsibility and accountability are necessary for the successful design, development,

execution, implementation and survival of any disaster planning and preparedness program. These levels of responsibility and accountability either directly or indirectly influence the process of mitigating and controlling a possible disaster.

Roles, Duties and Responsibilities

In this section, a general outline of the responsibilities and duties of the various members of the disaster committee is documented. This outline is not exhaustive and is intended only as guide as the size and nature of the library's collection will affect which titles and roles, responsibilities and duties are applicable. The University of the West Indies (Mona Campus) (Bob-Semple, 2003), Colorado State Library (2010), Bertrand Library Disaster Plan (2005), the National Library of Australia (n.d.), Cornell University Libraries (2006) and several other institutions have disaster plans that outline some examples of the RDRs of persons who will be involved in the preparation for and response to library disaster and recovery exercises. Some of these job titles are disaster coordinator, disaster team leader, the deputy disaster coordinator, assistant disaster coordinator, recovery coordinator, assistant coordinator, first aid coordinator, information system coordinator, public relation or communications coordinator, searcher, building officer, service recovery coordinator, recording, documentation or reporting officer, administrative coordinator, and volunteers.

Even though the titles differ, their function, duties and responsibilities are similar in nature. The difference is largely due to the nature, size and type of their collection as well as the preference for the name of the job title is institutional based or what is established in the organizational structure. However if an institution has more than one library, coordinators may be assigned to individual libraries or a separate disaster committee may operate independently in each library. This is due to the distance and location from the parent organization. The size of the library and the potential and type of disaster will determine the size and composition of the disaster team or committee. For example, a number of libraries will have a dedicated librarian assigned as chairperson of the disaster committee with specific duties and responsibilities. This responsibility is incorporated in the job description of the particular individual. Due to the varying titles associated with the positions, only a few, which are common to most libraries, will be used as a guide to formulate the list of duties, therefore libraries will need to make

modifications to suit their institution. Persons on the committee should be given job descriptions as a guide to perform efficiently and effectively.

Composition of a Disaster Committee

Kostagiolas, et al., (2001) cited from Lindell et al., (2006) the notion that a disaster plan should be different for every library and depends on its size and composition as well as the available budget. Therefore depending on any size institution, the composition and size of the team will vary. Medium to large institutions may have as many as 10–20 persons on its committee, especially if the library has branches or different locations. This will influence the number of persons who will be assigned with specific titles and charged with specific duties and responsibilities. In all institutions, the most important role is the disaster coordinator and/or the recovery coordinator. In large institutions there may be a disaster coordinator, a deputy coordinator and assistant coordinators, while in smaller institutions there will be only a disaster coordinator, and the role of deputy disaster coordinator will be assigned to a person who has responsibility for other roles on the committee. The actual titles assigned to persons will vary depending on the preference of the institution. Some of the duties and responsibilities of the core members may be assigned to sub-committees members who will also play important roles in specific areas. For example, a library with more than one physical location may have branch coordinators with committees.

The Disaster Coordinator should be responsible and accountable for the following areas:

- Informing the head of the institution regarding the nature and type of disaster
- Seeking, coordinating and directing the efforts of the disaster or emergency exercises
- Guiding and communicating the action plan to the Disaster Team members
- Liaising with senior management of the parent institution and other related entities that will play a key role in the exercises
- Notifying the recovery coordinator and the team of the nature and type of the disaster
- Making the necessary arrangements to secure funding or approval for funding to acquire the relevant supplies, services and equipment
- Planning, coordinating, educating and training team members and staff on a regular basis
- Developing and assigning roles, duties and responsibilities to team members to perform their duties effectively and efficiently
- Organizing and performing emergency drills periodically

- Periodically updating the disaster manual or plan
- Submitting periodical reports on the state of disaster preparedness at the institution

Deputy Disaster Coordinator should be responsible and accountable for the following areas:

- Performing all the duties and responsibilities of the disaster coordinator in his/her absence
- Ensuring that disaster/emergency supplies are at the stipulated level
- Performing the role of coordinator in institutions that have decentralized units in different locations
- Assisting with the delivery of training, education and awareness programs
- Providing support to Disaster Coordinator in the execution of his/her duties

The Recovery Coordinator should be responsible and accountable for the following areas:

- Assessing the extent of the damage
- Preparing a recovery timetable and budget in conjunction with the disaster coordinator and recovery team members
- Keeping track of changes that may have occurred in theory and technique
- Establishing salvage priorities
- Determining the types of restoration to be undertaken based on the nature and type of disaster
- Training and coordinating staff in the salvaging process
- Overseeing any repairs, rebinding or conservation operations and arranging for alternative storage if necessary
- Overseeing the clean-up process after a disaster
- Preparing the final report on the disaster recovery exercises

Building Maintenance Personnel should be responsible and accountable for the following areas:

- Inspecting the building and determining if repairs are needed
- Making recommendations and prioritizing the areas in need of repairs
- Periodically checking the electrical, plumbing and other building facilities
- Ensuring that the roof, elevators, sprinklers, fire extinguishers, emergency exits, and security systems are inspected periodically

- Submitting periodical reports on the state of the building
- Must have a thorough knowledge of the structure and layout of the building (have a blueprint of the building accessibility)
- In the event of pending disaster, ensure all electrical switches are off
- Ensuring that all exits and entrances including windows are locked and secure
- Ensuring that the water mains are locked or off
- In a disaster mode, ensuring that cleaning teams are organized as required

First-Aid Coordinator should be responsible and accountable for the following areas:

- Maintaining currency in first aid training and practices
- Keeping an updated inventory of basic supplies
- Periodically meeting to have refresher sessions with team
- Prior to an evacuation, gathering first-aid supplies and establishing a station near assembly point
- Submitting a report of any injuries to the head of the institution
- Coordinating any counseling that may be required

Information Technology or Information System Coordinator should be responsible and accountable for the following areas:

- Ensuring that periodical back-up of records and electronic information is done (weekly or on a monthly basis in any other location or off-site location)
- Ensuring that storage media such as tapes, external drives, CDs, DVDs are safely stored at an off-site location
- Establishing a priority list for salvaging electronic information and storage devices
- Keeping track of changes that may have occurred in theory and technique of salvaging electronic data and equipment
- Supervising the salvaging of data processing equipment and electronic files and submitting a report to the head of the institution
- Coordinating the relocation, if necessary, and cleaning of equipment

The Public Relations Coordinator should be responsible and accountable for the following areas:

- Preparing notices to be circulated and mounted on notice boards

- Keeping email correspondence with head and other relevant persons
- Providing draft brief or information to be submitted to the head of the institution for local newspapers/newsletters
- Assisting in the drafting of institution's news brief

The Photographer should be responsible and accountable for the following areas:

- Ensuring that the institution has relevant pictorial documentation
- Ensuring that pictures are taken of the building, equipment, machines and storage, as well as the collection (before and after record)
- Ensuring the accuracy of information, including dates, times and persons in all photographs
- Taking photographs of the disaster and damage

Branch, Department or Unit Coordinators

In large to medium-sized institutions or where the library, archive or record center has more than one location, it will become necessary to have branch or floor coordinators who will be required to perform all the duties, have the responsibilities, and be accountable in the same way as those in the parent location. These individuals will have the responsibility of knowing the layout of the area, the position of exit locations and fire extinguishers, and have knowledge of evacuation procedures.

All staff members

Staff members should be knowledgeable about the building, the location of fire extinguishers and emergency exits so that they can assist persons occupying the building in being evacuated in a timely and orderly manner. Some staff members who are not part of the disaster committee will be responsible for:

- Ensuring that disabled persons are evacuated from the floor or building
- Assisting with any emergency measures in their respective locations
- Checking restrooms, closing doors and windows, turning off lights and unplugging all electrical equipment
- Notify members of the Disaster Committee of specific problems and seeking their assistance if required

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to highlight the importance of documented RDRs in disaster and emergency manuals. The research has revealed that this documentation is either extremely limited or lacking in the manuals of many institutions. Therefore the plan itself can be a “disaster” in the case of a disaster.

A significant number of institutions with basic disaster and/or emergency and recovery plans will be prepared to handle disasters based on their preparedness level. However, some will face challenges in the operation and execution of the plan. Furthermore, challenges may arise regarding the continuity of an established and organized disaster and emergency management committee, which could lead to chaos in the face of a disaster in the absence of fully documented roles, functions, duties and responsibilities by referring to oral history or someone’s interpretation of what is expected a situation.

Therefore the second section of this paper is critical for those institutions that have not developed this section of their plans as well as those that are planning to write their disaster and emergency manuals as they would recognize that it is very important to have a holistic approach to the writing of a comprehensive disaster manual. Developing a comprehensive disaster manual facilitates continuity especially in the absence of any members or the replacement of any individual. In addition, a comprehensive disaster manual would provide the type and level of training for members and future members of the committee, the management of disaster and mitigation, and the participation in the recovery exercise in the event of a disaster. This is extremely important as each disaster team member will carry out their duties and responsibilities effectively and efficiently.

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Published: May 2015

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