

MLIS/1/CT/02

Unit 3:

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

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DISASTER MANAGEMENT

The increasing occurrence of natural and human-caused disasters, including armed conflicts, is causing extensive loss of life, damage to property, and harm to the environment. Natural disasters like floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, landslides, volcanic eruptions and drought also cause tremendous devastation. There is an increase in the frequency of these disasters and the damage caused by them. Libraries and archival collections are not unaffected by their devastating impact. The countries are gradually shifting from disaster response to a more proactive approach to disaster management. A proactive stance to reduce the toll of disasters in the region requires a more comprehensive approach that encompasses both pre-disaster risk reduction and post-disaster recovery. And this is evident in case of documentary and cultural heritage also. This Unit discusses the various disasters and their impact on library and archival collections. A proper disaster management strategy should be formulated in order to avoid disasters and to mitigate the impact of any disasters that do occur.

TYPES OF DISASTERS

The term disaster may be defined as any occurrence that threatens human safety and/ or causes damage to library facilities and materials. Disasters can be natural or man-made depending on their origin. Disasters related to extreme weather events (floods, cyclones, tornadoes, blizzards, droughts) occur regularly. Disasters cannot be predicted and there is little that can be done to prevent these disasters as most of the disasters occur suddenly and perhaps unexpectedly. Disasters can be minor or major, and range from roof and plumbing leaks which can be repaired by in-house personnel; to broken water mains, power disruptions which require large effort and money for repairs; to major catastrophes, such as earthquakes, floods, tornadoes etc. in which all the organisation's operations are disrupted, all utilities are out of order, and destruction occurs on a massive scale. These disasters include fires, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, and workplace violence. Any of these disasters, large or small, natural or man-made, has the potential to harm the library's collections, the building, the library employees, and the library users. In addition to potential damage, the disaster may disrupt the services that the library offers to its users. As Henson has put it "A library disaster is a threat that might cause harm to the library collection, building, staff, or users, or it is an unscheduled disruption of normal library services". Having a disaster response plan in place before a disaster strikes can help the library minimise the impact of a disaster and restore collections and services in an optimum time. Let us first understand the various kinds of disasters that library and information centres face.

Fire

Fire-related disasters are often even more destructive than those caused by water alone. Fires produce enormous amounts of heat, smoke, and toxic gases, and the process of extinguishing the fire sometimes causes as much or more damage than the fire itself. Causes of fire include natural phenomena such as lightning and earthquakes, as well as old or defective wiring or heating equipment, accumulations of combustible materials, and arson.

Water

Heavy floods and storms that cause wind or water-related damage are typical natural disasters for libraries and information centres. The floods that may result from such events can be devastating. Besides natural occurrences such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods, water damage can come from malfunctioning plumbing, sprinkler, and air conditioning systems. Floods, rain, sprinkler pipe breaks and other disasters can leave paper records, microfilm and other library materials soaked with water. Once water has entered the collection areas, a danger of a mold problem arises, especially if the humidity is high.

Earthquake

An earthquake is a natural catastrophe that may effect the collections in a library or museum. During an earthquake walls, ceilings, and shelves may collapse causing structural damage. The library buildings may be destroyed and collections buried underneath covered in debris and mud. The damage to archival collections due to earthquake could be irreplaceable.

Theft and Vandalism

Library collections are also effected by theft and vandalism. Other man-made disasters are war, terrorism, rioting. These lead to the destruction of collections of libraries and museums. During war a number of factors which affect libraries apart from the shelling are phenomena like the movement of people from the affected areas. Recent conflicts in Africa, in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan have shown the risks to the archival heritage from the devastating effects of armed conflict.

Chemicals

ster dust, sawdust, and other particulates filter into the atmosphere and then into the collections. They abrade the paper and act as a catalyst for chemical damage. Various chemicals present in the atmosphere, are spread from one area to another by air-handling systems, normal air currents, and traffic. When structural damage occurs, the person in charge of the over-all building maintenance should assess the structural damage and determine when it is safe to enter the building. After this preliminary assessment, damage to the affected materials needs to be assessed. In addition to the "additional" disasters caused by wind, water, and fire, libraries and archives should be well prepared to face threats of terrorism in all forms. Bombings, and other terrorist acts are also capable of causing mass destruction. Disaster planning for these types of extreme events presents an enormous challenge for librarians.

PREPAREDNESS FOR DISASTERS

The basic principle of disaster preparedness is "to plan for a disaster that one hopes will never occur". A disaster plan is a document that describes the procedures devised to prevent and prepare for disasters, and those proposed to respond to and recover from disasters when they occur. The responsibility for performing these tasks is allocated to various staff members who comprise 'the disaster team' (Lyall, 1993). The basic elements of a disaster management programme are a written document, both in paper and on the library's website, and a well-trained Library staff. The document should be reviewed and updated at least annually. The various disaster management strategies should be discussed at any new staff orientation programme as well as in periodic refresher sessions for long-term staff. A well-documented disaster management programme enables to keep the staff members well prepared in the face of any emergency. Thus, formulating a written plan is a basic step towards preparing for disasters.

Disaster planning is a complex process. The entire process must be supported at the highest level of the organisation if it is to be effective. Various guidelines for the **Disaster Planning Process** are mentioned below. The disaster plan should include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following steps.

Assigning responsibility

Conducting preliminary research.

Identification and Assessment of potential hazards

Identification of resources

Setting up liaisons with local emergency agencies

Establishment of goals and tasks for team members

Conduct a collection survey and determine salvage priorities

Financial Assessment

Documentation of the plan

Ease of Implementation

Maintaining the plan



Reference

<http://egyankosh.ac.in>

THANKS

