Expect the Unexpected: Be Prepared When Disaster Strikes

By Ana Rosa Blue.

This full day preconference session was organized by the Health Libraries Association of BC and convened by Elisheba Muturi Kihara. The day's agenda included three sessions presented by:

- Patricia Daum, Manager, Records Management and Privacy, BCIT;
- Glen Magel, Director, Safety and Security, BCIT, Burnaby Campus;
- Guy Robertson, President, Robertson Emergency Planning Inc.

The day-long pre-conference session addressed the disaster response and recovery process for business resumption, from emergency conservation and salvage to human safety and business resumption.

Risk management and disaster planning framework: BCIT's experience of implementing a business continuity plan

Participants learned from BCIT's experience the value and necessity of developing an effective emergency response program. In this session, program components developed at BCIT were explained. BCIT has more than 30,000 students and 2,000 employees. In 2003, BCIT's first emergency response policy assigned the program responsibility to the BCIT Safety and Security department. Following that, the emergency plans and business continuity plans were prepared by more than 20 campus departments.

The Role of Libraries in Providing Information and Support during Disasters was explored, as participants were equipped with practical knowledge to plan and run an effective disaster information and resource centre when one is needed.

Participants learned best practices, from all three dynamic speakers, to assist in dealing with disasters and catastrophes in their library. Below are the highlights of the top best practices.

Tricia Daum and Glen Magel, from BCIT, addressed emergency preparedness from an institutional point-of-view. BCIT has prepared itself to be a disaster resilient community. After a boiler explosion in April 2004, it was decided to have one plan for all of BCIT and build a business resiliency plan. All departments and schools at BCIT have a role in restoring business. The Board of Governors has approved the plans. People now understand their business better than ever before. BCIT provides many tools to educate employees on how to create a business continuity plan. BCIT Emergency Preparedness Guide: http://www.bcit.ca/files/marcom/pdf/emergency_preparedness_guide.pdf   See also: Individual and Neighbourhood All-Hazard Emergency Preparedness Workbook: http://www.pep.bc.ca/hazard_preparedness/AllHazards_WEB.pdf

Top best tips from Glen:

1. If you ever participate in a committee, make sure that the business continuity plan meets the needs of your organization.   The institution needs to have a clear understanding of the plan so they can get back to business as quickly as possible. Recovery and Business Continuity is when an event occurs that requires business continuity immediately after everyone has been rescued. Take care of injures, then take care of assets and then you can address how to get back to business.
2. Preparedness – make sure that employees and students have training and education in emergency planning and then – train – train – train. Another important part of the training is to exercise practice, practice, practice – drills.
3. What we do in event of an incident has to done safely and there has to be one person in charge.
4. People are the most important aspect and a huge component of training. Thus, when disaster strikes your primary concern should be your people – then the community.
5. Personal safety is your first priority, followed by buildings and then getting back to business. If you do not have a plan – you will lose business – i.e. customers will go elsewhere. Always have a spare plan in your back pocket.
6. Familiarize yourself with the "Emergency Operations Centre", ("EOC"), http://www.pep.bc.ca/bcerms/bcerms.html. This was developed through the BC

government.[1] Municipalities must train their people. Elected officials must have working knowledge of EOC plan for their municipality.

7. BCIT's dynamic emergency response team members train throughout the year. The more people learn, the more they hunger for more information to advance themselves. When people become totally engaged, they are more likely to share information with family.

8. Ensure that employees are comfortable about returning to work.

9. It is imperative to have a recovery and business continuity plan. Build a business resiliency plan.

10. Be prepared to survive at least 72-hours after a disaster in your home or workplace without help of emergency response officials.

Top best tips from Tricia who discussed vital and archival records protection:

1. Identify records vital to business recovery and protect those records from loss.

2. Define what vital and important means in your context. List the types of protection methods.

3. It is essential to understand your collection. Know and identify records that are vital to your recovery. To ensure the continuity of the unit that you are responsible for – filming, imaging, information in two different places. Archives are one huge warehouse of records.

4. Criteria – for calling a collection vital:
   a) Irreplaceable – reproduction does not have the same value as the original
   b) Needed so money can be recovered promptly
   c) Required to expedite the restoration of a critical service
   d) Evidence of legal status, ownership, accounts receivable , land title

5. Records might be replaced, but there is cost and time involved in replacing them. Invest about $200 per foot for recovery in case of water-damaged books, etc. i.e. freeze-dry. In day-to-

day operations take steps, that in case of loss, the record can be replaced.

6. Understand and document parts of the collection that are:
   a) Replaceable or not
   b) Worth the cost to freeze, dry, clean
   c) To be discarded if damaged
   d) If irreplaceable, then consider filming, imaging, alternative formats.

7. Take these initial action steps:
   a) Take pictures of what they used every day and add those to continuity plan
   b) Use staff and students – to help mop up

8. In the recovery phase, be mindful of:
   a) Water damage – dealing with mould
   b) Coordination – regular meetings, senior management meetings
   c) Provincial government, etc.

9. Know where the water shut-off is for the sprinkler system.

10. Close doors where computers are located.

Top tips from Guy Robertson

In any disaster, there is terminal confusion. Disasters or emergency situations fall into these categories:

(1) Incident – minor;
(2) Emergency – heart attack, person has been attacked, we can control the situation;
(3) Disaster – We lose control of events – e.g. pandemic, 9/11;
(4) Catastrophe – disaster that gets out of hand;
(5) Crisis – has a life of its own.   Librarians can face a 'crisis' when someone comes to the library and challenges a book on the shelf.

Disasters, catastrophes and crises do not necessarily have anything to do with each other. Your crisis management plan should be distinct from the general disaster plan.   A crisis management plan should only be about 8 – 10 pages. **Borrowing someone else's plans is not a good idea.** You should have a business continuity plan so that you easily have access to data.

There is an expectation that government will step in if all hell breaks loose. It will not. We are on our own. Plan for what people will do.

1. Are people safe? This should be your first priority. Have a plan in place and ensure that staff knows about it and is familiar with it.   It is no good to

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[1] **British Columbia Emergency Response Management System: Site Support Level (EOC) Operational Guidelines** This manual guides the management, organization, responsibilities, and coordination necessary to provide for effective response and recovery from disasters and emergencies at the local authority and other emergency operations centre (site support) level. (284 pages) http://www.pep.bc.ca/training/EOC_Level_2.pdf

have a plan that no one else knows about or has never been tested. You have to take command of your workplace, as libraries can be targets.

2. How do we get back into business again? **NEVER** say that you have lost a library or a branch. Recovery plan should make note of what will be replaced. Be sure to keep notes.
   a) ESL patrons are an argument for better signage – i.e. in multiple languages. In the USA everyone does this.
   b) Need to know how to use the First Aid kit for it to be useful to anyone.
   c) Telephone imposes a moral risk. Cannot always get a message out. Cell phone will also be jammed.

3. Affiliate with other libraries. Form a consortium to address areas of mutual interest, e.g. deal with flood responders, book theft, etc. On-site and site-specific planning is very important.

4. Set up a committee and give them a time limit. Plan for before, during and after a disaster and prepare and mitigate those risks. If you really backup data – you may never have to go into data recovery.

5. Business continuity involves ownership and responsibility – i.e. Director. Learn how to recognize things and decide whether to declare them or not. i.e. data loss situation – keep in-house for as long as possible. Business resumption teams – in many libraries these are already in place. Should think about alternative sites, i.e. branches or hotels that can be used as a scrambling point.

6. When systems librarians are confronted with some form of problem, they should think CIA first. **CIA – Confidentiality – Integrity – Availability.** i.e. borrower's records – loss of confidentiality. Cover all potential scenarios from data loss. **Recognize it, but do NOT declare it.**

7. Librarians should know details about their buildings – i.e. Power, water, etc. how old those systems are?

8. Post-disaster security – Ask yourself if your library will be secure if you have to shut it and leave.

9. **Vital records? "Número uno" are your catalogue and borrower records. Do not assume that they are of no interest to villains.**

10. Form strategic alliances with businesses that will need to be there immediately:

a) Moisture control vendor is good to have as a strategic alliance partner, in case library carpet gets wet. Need to move on it right away as water soaks into underlay and interacts with it to create a stench.

b) Need a good employee assistance plan. Managers should be aware of this, and be able to spot it. Librarians need help when collection has been lost. Verbal chat might be adequate – but collection loss is more acute.

11. Recovery and restoration plans need to be taken care of. **Use the word, "damaged" never "lost".**

12. Communications – Have a 1-800 line for both employees and patrons. Employee Assistance Program should be available for post-disaster counseling

13. Make plans in case the bus system goes down. If staff cannot reach the branch – then what? Has to be agreed upon beforehand. There will be curiosity about our workplace. Transportation – taxis will get around much faster than police. Cabbies know routes far better than anyone else. Cabbies also have better fuelling. Also need to consider that there may not be any transportation whatsoever.

14. Succession planning – replace key staff members if they go missing. Need succession planning for management and other key staff – i.e. IT staff.
   a) Includes: Sharing of information and temporary replacements
   b) Testing and auditing. Do it, but keep it simple, keep it regular and keep it brief.
   c) Plan for a 45-minute special in coffee room once every three months - pocket brochure, for example. If this becomes a regular procedure, everyone will be far better off. Consider alternative sites – hotel, community centre… etc. When will payroll pay you?

15. Orientation and training – make sure that backups work, etc.

16. Damage impact assessment – when you talk about serving patrons during and after disasters – have to make sure that staff is safe and that damage to physical plant is contained. If you want a fast damage assessment – can call in consultants. Have to take into consideration how fast people respond. i.e. culturally defined.

17. System-wide operation plans do not have to cover the entire system.

18. **Key question – Is it safe? If you are attempting to determine extent of damage, the standard measure is to look up, look down and all around.**

19. Is workplace WorkSafeBC compliant? i.e. debris may get in the way. Look at cabling… etc. Broken windows – can be cracked, but must not be shattered. Where might trees fall? If working in a library with a multi-story parking lot – have been taking a beating lately – because of the type of vehicle parking there, e.g. SUVs.

20. Is it worth opening?   What happens if the power goes out?   Is it worth opening anyway? If it has windows, maybe? If it is shrouded in darkness, then maybe not? If there is no running water or functional washrooms, you have a strong argument for keeping the library closed.   If there is no library catalogue – you can probably open up – but should resume normal operations within 24-hours. **If there are any doubts about the structure of the building – keep it shut.**

21. Have annual inspections:

22. Roofs leak – we are seeing a change in precipitation, i.e. rain hits walls and so we are seeing certain kinds of flooding and also seeing a lot of ponding. I.e. water accumulating on flat rooftop – adds a lot of weight to the roof. If the water freezes over there is additional stress.

23. Lock failure and alarm failure – If you are going to have locks, they are only as good as your annual inspections.

24. Whose decision is it whether to open or remain closed? What is the chain of command?   If half the staff is missing, that might determine whether you open or remain closed.   Do we open entire system or only a few branches?

25. Focus on what type of information and services you might want to distribute and offer. For example: message centre, back-up postal service, meeting space, information distribution centre, volunteer communications system:

    a) One of the main things that libraries will distribute is Yellow Pages information. Consider also having on hand: Cartographic information – i.e. have local maps on paper available for people; Contact information of people to call; Information about conservation: photos, antiques, etc.; News updates – justified in having battery-powered radios at library site.

    b) There will be displaced people, abandoned, out of place, lost, etc. Ask people to sit down, as this tends to calm people down.

26. Succession planning – who are your key staff? I.e. Directors may not be key. You have to determine who is most important to operations. If not available, who else can fill in? Circulation desk staff is very important. IT staff should be available and should be backed up.

27. Normalization – control messages to patrons and soothe staff members. Let staff talk about it. I.e. verbal therapy.

28. **Plan to have to bring in extra staffing in an emergency. The more staff you can bring in the better. Bring back retired staff to help. It is best to be involved. Also, be prepared for increased absenteeism.**

29. **Some service is better than none** – *i.e. reference desk in parking lot of library – show the flag… show that you are still open for business – regardless.*

The speakers delivered a very interesting pre-conference session. Session participants greatly benefitted from the expertise and great tips shared by the speakers.

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