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Disaster Preparedness in China, Korea, Australia and Japan:
Reports from National Libraries

Disaster Preparedness at the National Library of Australia

Jennifer Lloyd, Manager Preservation Services

The National Library is built in a part of the world that does not experience many natural disasters but we do have disasters that affect our collections. It is the responsibility of the Manager of Preservation to make sure that the Library is prepared for these disasters, and that the risks to the collections have been reduced as much as possible before the disaster takes place.

Most of the disasters that the Library experiences are as a result of workmen damaging water pipes while undertaking building work. A few years ago this happened in an area above our Asian Collections stack. The water leaked through the building and rained down onto a small part of the Asian Collections stack area. There were about 300 items water damaged during this incident with about 20 discarded because the pages had stuck together.



Making decisions about what to save and what to throw away is an important part of disaster management. The items we discarded were able to be replaced by buying a new copy.

The types of disasters that affect the National Library's collections include things such as fire and water (because whenever there is a fire there is also water), flood, dust, insect infestation and damage that occurs because of the collection being used in some way.

In 1985 the Library experienced a major fire. This fire resulted in smoke damage to the building and collections, and water damage to a large amount of material. The fire showed us that the Library needed a plan of what to do when a disaster occurs, and staff need to be trained so that they also know what to do. The fire also helped us understand that we can reduce the risks of damage to the collections if we identify the risks before the disaster.

The first Collection Disaster Plan was created in 1986 as a direct result of this fire, and the Library's management considered how to better plan in the future. A disaster plan must identify the risks that could affect the collection and put in place strategies to reduce these risks.

In order to manage the risks, staff must first **identify the risks**, determine **how likely** they are, what **impact** they would have on the collection if they did occur, and then reduce the risk by putting in place some management strategies.

When the Asian Collections were damaged by the water from the sprinkler we should have been aware that workmen were in the building and covered the collection material in the stacks below the area where they were working. Our experience of the National Library building is that water always drips through the expansion joints in the floor, so we always need to look after collections **below** building work.

As a result of this disaster we improved our procedures and this type of incident has not caused damage like this again.

The Disaster Plan

The Library's collection disaster plan contains the following information:

- Information on monitoring collection areas for potential disaster – this includes information on parts of the building that are known to leak when it rains, and monitoring areas where workmen are working.
- The plan also contains policy and actions that assist in the management of the Library's collection disaster strategies. It is important that people know who should be in charge when a disaster happens.
- The plan sets out what we mean by disaster preparedness, and the role and responsibilities of staff during the disaster.
- It talks about what actions people should take after a disaster so that we have a coordinated response to salvaging.
- The Library has a Register of Significant Material which lists the most important collections in the Library so that we know which items should be protected or salvaged first.
- It outlines the types of training we undertake in the Library to keep people aware of the issues and teach them what to do.
- The plan also shows the locations of all the emergency supplies, what equipment is supplied and describes how these will be maintained.

Disaster recovery supplies

The Library has a disaster wheelie bin in every stack area of the building. These bins are used by staff to deal with a disaster, either before, during or after. They are useful because they can easily be taken to where the leak is occurring, and can be used to catch water.

The bins all have the following items in them:

- plastic sheeting
- sticky tape – to tape the sheeting in place
- a torch and batteries



- gloves
- a bucket and a larger bin to catch water
- some cloths to wipe down shelves
- scissors
- water soaking pads and 'socks' – these are laid out on the floor to stop the water spreading

Business Continuity

Over the years the Library has developed a number of documents and procedures to help us when we have a disaster. The Collection Disaster Plan is one document within the Library's **Business Continuity Framework**. Other documents that create this framework include the building emergency procedures, the information technology recovery plan and the communication strategy for the Library.

The Business Continuity Framework aim to consider the risks to all areas of the Library's business. This includes things like if the computer servers stop working, if there is a power cut at the Library, or if the Library has no water because of a burst water main somewhere else in Canberra. These documents provide information and advice to staff on what to do during and after a disaster and help us return the Library to normal business as soon as possible.

The Library's Business Continuity Framework is managed by a committee called the **Emergency Planning Committee** (EPC). This committee is chaired by the Assistant-Director General of Corporate Services, and includes several other Assistant-Director Generals in the membership. It is attended by managers from **every business area** of the Library and is held every two months.

The EPC aims to:

- Minimise the chances of any incidents occurring
- Reduce the impact of any incidents that do occur, and
- Respond as appropriately, effectively and efficiently as possible
- Recover as quickly and completely as possible after the disaster, and
- Ensure any relevant lessons are learnt and applied from the Library's experience and the experience of others.

Whenever there is an incident in the Library which affects our business, the EPC meets to discuss the priorities for returning the Library back to normal operation. This helps us have a co-ordinated response to issues across the whole Library and ensures an orderly return to business.

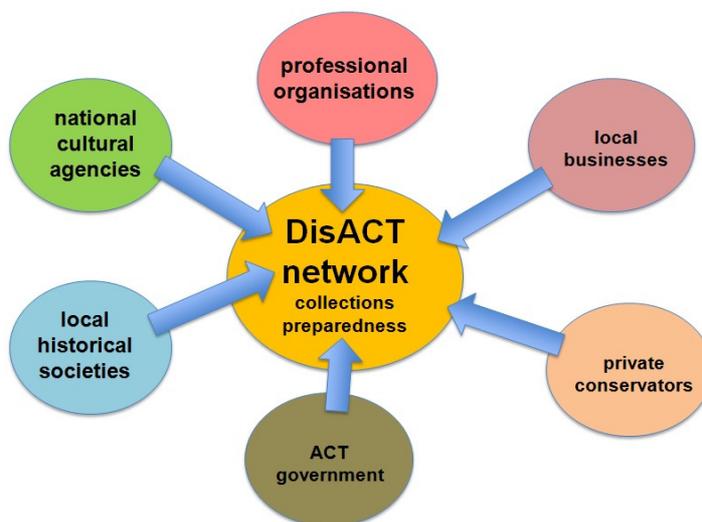
Diasters Australian Capital Territory (DisACT)

In the broader community, Canberra has a network that meets regularly to discuss collection disaster preparedness. This network is called Disasters ACT. DisACT is quite informal and has representatives from every cultural organisation within the ACT plus people from government departments, local historical societies, small businesses – anyone who wants to learn about protecting their collections from disaster.

DisACT maintains an emergency contact list so that we can contact each other, and also a list of the types of equipment that are available within the ACT that others can use. The small institutions can borrow equipment from the large institutions, and get emergency supplies of boxes, plastic, blotting paper etc. Equipment available includes large freezers, dehumidifiers and wet vacuum cleaners.

Each year DisACT organises two training sessions for people to teach staff how to respond to a collection disaster. The people are taught the principles of disaster preparedness, and then get to salvage some wet collections. The items used are old books and newspapers that would have otherwise been thrown away.

During these workshops the staff get to find out what it is like working in a dirty, wet environment, and how tiring this can be. They also learn about how important it is to record the location of collections that have been moved. They also have some fun!



More recently Canberra experienced a chemical fire which caused concerns because of the toxic fumes from the chemicals that were burning. The fire occurred near collection storage facilities of four major cultural institutions: the National Film and Sound Archives, the Australian War Memorial, the National Archives of Australia and the National Museum of Australia. During the fire, DisACT representatives met to discuss what they could do about the collections that were at risk. Fortunately no collections were harmed by the fire and we didn't need to do anything.

IFLA PAC

The National Library has been an IFLA PAC centre for many years. We reach out into our community and region to assist others with the Preservation of cultural collections. Any work that we undertake to improve our preservation activities is shared with anyone who wishes to have it and is made publicly available on our website.

Recent project include:

- The development of an illumination policy which has set out the conditions we expect to be met for our highest priority collections. These collections must remain in good condition for as long as possible and the policy will help us ensure that the exhibition of these items will be limited so that the colours in them do not fade.
- The development of a new digital library system. Information about this will be available to others throughout the project.
- Visitors from preservation staff from other institutions, both Australian and overseas,
- Digitisation and preservation workshop at the National Library of Indonesia on the preservation of manuscripts.

- The preservation laboratory in the National Library of Australia regularly has conservation students carrying out placement training to improve their skills. This includes students from Australian courses and from overseas.

Conclusion

Disaster preparedness involves being prepared for the things that you think are likely to happen to your collections. It is important to ask for assistance from other people and organisations when something does happen to your collections, and to learn from what happened during the disaster.

I would like to thank the National Diet Library for giving me this opportunity to talk about disaster preparedness at the National Library of Australia.