This research is a study of disaster plans of public libraries in Virginia, and it serves to relay the importance of creating an effective disaster plan. Libraries were contacted in order to collect information on whether or not they had a disaster plan in place. Out of two-hundred and thirty-three libraries, sixty-four gave clear responses, and thirteen had electronically available plans. These plans were analyzed by examining two types of data: quantitative, such as presence of table of contents, number of pages, and creation date or last update, and qualitative, such as the overall content in relation to man-made and natural disasters, supplemental materials, and the three main aspects of disaster planning (preparedness, response, and recovery).

Headings:

Disasters

Disaster Planning

Public Libraries

Virginia
PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE, AND RECOVERY: DISASTER PLANNING FOR VIRGINIA’S PUBLIC LIBRARIES

by

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A Master’s paper submitted to the faculty of the School of Information and Library Science of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April 2012

Approved by

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INTRODUCTION

Public libraries face many known and expected challenges: budget cuts, digitization of materials, unhappy patrons, etc. However, libraries face greater obstacles when it comes to unexpected man-made disasters and unpredictable forces of nature. Unfortunately, one of the major contributors to the significant amount of damage is simply the lack of proper planning. A large number of libraries do not have a disaster plan, despite the fact that plans provide a great advantage to recovery and peace of mind. A public library that develops an effective disaster plan will recover more quickly, or even be able maintain service levels and structure, than a public library without such a plan in place.

Disaster planning, as a whole, is more than replacing a collection or rebuilding a library. The Terrebonne Parish Library in Houma, LA is a great example of why preparedness, response, and recovery are so important:

In the course of a single month [after Katrina], thousands of evacuees to the Terrebonne Civic Center steadily migrated into the main library building just 100 yards away. They went there to communicate with loved ones, consult vital resources, keep their business affairs in order, and congregate for support. The center may have been the designated go-to place, but the library, as that agora of hectic everyday life, proved an intuitive and essential haven.¹

What happens when a library is not ready to meet the needs of atypical patrons due to damage or lack of training? What happens when they cannot even serve their regulars?

Disaster planning takes both questions into account, provides solutions, and also addresses the staff and relationships within the community.

In 2005, Heritage Preservation and the Institute of Museum and Library Services created a survey to determine preservation needs and emergency preparedness in libraries, archives, and museums. The results showed that 78% of libraries in the United States did not have a disaster plan.2

It is particularly important for libraries in Virginia to have a plan, as the state is no stranger to disasters. Within the past six years, 90% of the state’s residents have experienced extreme weather events such as blizzards and tropical storms.3 Examples within the past three years include snowstorms in 2009 and 2010, tropical storm Lee and hurricane Irene in 2011, and a 5.8 magnitude earthquake in 2011. With 42,597,164 library visits in 2010 alone4, can these libraries afford to be unprepared?

By examining the content and quality of Virginia libraries’ disaster plans, this study hopes to increase awareness and support for planning. As a result, the percentage of unprepared libraries in the future will decrease, and libraries will continue to be an essential part of their community despite emergencies and forces of nature.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

When reading about how disasters affect libraries, physical damage is often the first concern. It is alarming to consider how fragile the painstakingly developed collections, expensive computer stations, and all of the furnishings are when compared to raging fires and floods. The devastation left behind by hurricane Katrina is a prime example. The damage to buildings and materials, coupled with the uncertainties of repopulation, severely impacted the ability of libraries to provide services. Fortunately, the main branch of the New Orleans Public Library was designed by architects to endure an excessive amount of water caused by flooding. Thanks to initial construction planning, water damage was kept to a low level. If public libraries created solid disaster plans before being hit by inclement weather, similar to the way the architects constructed a solid building, they could also avoid high levels of damage. As the idiom goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The same thing applies to smaller cases. Even the slower, less intimidating growth of mold can wipe out entire shelves of books. After a five-year exposure to the elements via a hole in the roof and no heat or air conditioning, the Ridgeway branch of the Lenawee County Library system in Michigan was forced to dispose of close to eleven thousand items, its entire collection. Neglected by all but one family in the community,

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no monetary help was offered, and the future of the library seemed bleak. Despite its historical significance and protest from a neighboring resident, not a single person from Ridgeway attended the board meeting to advocate for the library. Nature had taken its course, and it was too late to salvage anything.

One solution to the above situation appears in several articles that suggest disaster planning for public libraries should start looking more like it does in the business realm. When a business is hit by a disaster, time and money are not the only factors affected; the longer it is shut down, the less likely it is to reach its users and reopen. A particularly interesting concept that goes along with this idea is called business continuity planning: when a business makes it a priority to do more than simply reconstruct after a disaster. Brooklyn Public Library’s Anne Candreva explains it well: “The question of how quickly we can get back on our feet has turned into how can we make sure to stay there in the first place.”

Effective disaster plans, therefore, need to also take into account how libraries act as more than a storehouse of materials. While materials are important, the services a public library provides are equally, if not more, important. Providing access to computers and the Internet is a common goal, but Katrina forced the libraries in Louisiana to steer away from traditional services and move towards things like distributing food and creating a sense of normalcy. Parking lots became distribution points for relief agencies, and issues of residency were reconsidered.

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Lastly, the literature makes a point to mention the human factor. Encouragingly, almost every author writing about the creation of disaster plans emphasizes the importance of safety to the staff and patrons above anything else. A good amount of articles also explain how a run-of-the-mill document is no good if it does not take into account relationships.

Within the organization, choosing the right people makes a difference. People who stay calm, respond quickly, think clearly during chaotic moments, and have strong decision-making skills should be selected and recognized. In other words, “[administrators] should know who their go-to people are and rely on and trust them.” Leaders’ contact information should be included in the plan, and it should take into account communication failures during emergency situations, such as loss of power.

Outside of the organization, continued connection with groups from the local fire and police departments, preservation organizations, and churches are also very important. One library witnessed the unfortunate impact of the opposite: “lagging…leadership and splintered relationships in the community” prevented the restoration of their library, and they lost many of their staff. Additionally, depression played a significant part post-disaster, which further indicates the need for appropriate response and recovery plans.

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METHODOLOGY & OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this study, a disaster is one of two types. First, it is destruction caused by man, such as a bomb or arson. Second, it is destruction caused by a force of nature, such as a flood or the growth of mold. Both types of destruction impact the library in a negative way; a disaster damages the collection and library building, prevents service to patrons, and causes stress or anxiety for library staff.

A disaster plan is a document focusing on the three main aspects of disaster planning: preparedness, response, and recovery. In other words, it provides details on how to anticipate a disaster, how to react during the course of a disaster, and how to bring the library back to the condition and service it was at pre-disaster. The Virginia Public Library further defines a disaster plan as:

A document that outlines a systematic and planned response to safeguard records and other materials from potential disasters (floods, fires, earthquakes, etc.). Identifies most valuable and vulnerable parts of collection and provides method for removal and recovery of materials. Disaster planning is the physical act of gathering information, identifying resources, outlining resources, outlining responsibilities, and formulating plans in response to possible disasters.\textsuperscript{11}

A disaster plan can be a paper or electronic document.

The population studied is a sample of public libraries located in Virginia. By limiting the sample to one state, the data is more cohesive. In other words, it allows for an easier comparison of the libraries, since they are more likely to face similar disasters. Looking into what the plan includes and in what format the plan is made available will suggest whether or not the plan is an effective one. Additionally, it will serve in

determining whether or not a disaster plan has been recently revised. Anything more
than five years old will be considered out of date.

To obtain information, disaster plans were collected from public libraries in
Virginia through phone calls, chat reference, and email. Libraries were chosen from the
Virginia Public Libraries directory list\textsuperscript{12}. Out of the three-hundred and ninety-six
libraries, one was selected from each city. The new total, two-hundred and thirty-three,
was paired down even more to one library per county. Out of the ninety-five contacted,
sixty-four provided a response. Only thirteen had an electronic copy of a disaster plan
available to persons outside of library staff.

The collected plans were then analyzed in regards to the literature, particularly on
why public documents are developed and how they are used. Primarily, a disaster plan is
initiated by concerned staff in order to protect a library’s collection.\textsuperscript{13} This suggests
emphasis on the physical materials and building, although human safety is regarded as
the number one priority. It “provides step-by-step instructions that help to eliminate
panic, it ensures that proper decisions are taken … and limits recovery costs should a
disaster occur.”\textsuperscript{14} Therefore, a clear purpose, identification of potential hazards, and
sections on prevention, response, and recovery are important and should be included in
the document.

\textsuperscript{12} Publiclibraries.com (2012). Virginia public libraries. Retrieved from
http://www.publiclibraries.com/virginia.htm

\textsuperscript{13} Fleischer, S. V., & Heppner, M. J. (2009). Disaster planning for libraries and archives: What
you need to know and how to do it. Library & Archival Security, 22(2), 125-140.
Retrieved from Library Literature & Information Science Full Text

\textsuperscript{14} Morgan, G. G., & Smith, J. G. (1997). Disaster management in libraries: The role of a disaster
& Information Science Full Text
While there are several ways to critique a public document, the collected plans were analyzed in terms of organization and content as described above by the literature. They were then compared to other disaster plans from other libraries in Virginia to highlight similarities and differences. Ultimately, the data was used in determining the strength or effectiveness of disaster plans for Virginia’s public libraries.

EXPECTED RESULTS

By contacting a sample of libraries in Virginia and researching planning documents, this study hopes to relay the importance of creating and maintaining an effective disaster plan. Besides the physical destruction of buildings and collections, there are non-physical effects when it comes to the staff. Libraries play an important role in their community, and having a disaster plan in place will boost the recovery process and decrease mental strain for the public library and staff.

Several things are expected from the examination of responses. First, it is anticipated, as shown in the literature review, that most of the state’s libraries will have nonexistent or weak disaster plans. Of the plans in place, it is also expected that most will be out of date, or more than five years old. Characteristics of weak plans are significantly low page lengths and lack of sufficient content. In other words, they will leave out information about disaster preparedness, response, and/or recovery. For example, they may not contain emergency numbers, evacuation procedures, or major hazards such as fires and floods. Aspects of response will most likely be covered by all plans, but information about preparedness and especially recovery will not be found nearly as often.
RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Sixty-four of the contacted libraries in Virginia clearly indicated whether or not they had a disaster plan available. 47% of these did not have a plan in place, which is much lower than the 78% of libraries in the United States who responded to the survey by Heritage Preservation and the Institute of Museum and Library Services\(^\text{15}\). The other 53% had plans, and they ranged dramatically in amount and quality of content.

The libraries that did not have a disaster plan fell in to one of three groups based on their contact’s response to the question: “Does your library have a disaster or emergency plan?”

The first group, or 63% of the respondents answering in the negative, simply stated “no.” Although not asked to elaborate, staff members followed up with a reason for the absence. Often, they acknowledge the need by saying it was a good idea, or that they should probably have one. Hurricanes were specifically mentioned, which is not entirely surprising considering the amount of destruction caused by Katrina and that Virginia is at risk for this particular disaster along its eastern coast. Some staff did not think a plan was necessary. The explanations revolved around location, size, or common knowledge. For example, a library on a hill felt it was safe from flooding, others claimed their libraries were too small, and directors commented that a procedure was in place and known but not written down. Unfortunately, assumptions of safety are not guarantees.

Fires affect libraries no matter where they are located, something like size does not indicate value, and accessing knowledge is difficult when the only people aware of the emergency procedures are not present.

The second group, or 20% of libraries without plans, responded by saying they followed the county’s or city’s documents or procedures for disasters. While it is better than having nothing in place, using counties plans have many drawbacks. First of all, they are very general and do not take into account items specific to a public library. Secondly, they are often difficult to locate. When asked where the consulted documents could be found, not one staff member was able to give a direct answer. Often, they either transferred the call to someone else or gave a general number. After many transfers and phone calls, it was clear the process was a considerable issue. Time is of the essence during a disaster, and waiting an hour to reach someone with the county or city plan can be the difference between minimal damage and substantial damage for something such as a library collection. Even when the county’s Emergency Management department is found online, information is scarce. It may mention maintaining close relationships with fire and rescue organizations or having an emergency operations plan, but the actual document in an electronic format is missing. An easy solution would be to do the legwork and secure both the telephone number and copy of the document, making them readily available. It is also important to check for updates so the information stays current.

The third group, totaling 17% of the plan-less libraries, said they were in the process of creating a disaster plan. For some, creation lingered in the approval process or waited for an introduction in staff meetings. For others, research was still underway.
Again, without prompt, staff members shared the sources they were using in the development of their documents. The Library of Virginia website\(^{16}\) was the only source mentioned by more than one library. It offers downloadable and customizable content, such as an Emergency Pocket Response Plan, to accompany a library’s comprehensive plan. One library was considering using Agility Recovery\(^{17}\) services, which provides solutions for small and medium businesses. In response to a disaster, this organization would take control of the majority of recovery efforts for a monthly fee. Other actions that libraries mentioned were working with the local government and county plans, attending training sessions, and taking preservation courses. Libraries looked outside of the public sphere for ideas as well. For example, some sought out ideas from academic institutions such as the University of Virginia. Venturing outside of Virginia, one library looked to the State Library of Ohio, which developed an easy-to-follow Disaster Preparedness Plan for small public libraries\(^{18}\). Even with abundant sources, creating a plan can seem like a daunting task, and in addition to volunteering sources, staff also gave reasons for why their plan was still incomplete. For most, it centered around the time it takes to start the drafting process, but others found themselves procrastinating to finish the work they began. The number of staff available for the project was a factor affecting delay, and one librarian mentioned it would make a great project for an intern.

It was encouraging to find that 53% of the contacted libraries in Virginia said they had a disaster plan in place. However, the libraries also fell into three different groups based on format.

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\(^{17}\) [http://www2.agilityrecovery.com/](http://www2.agilityrecovery.com/)

The first group, composed of the 23% of libraries with plans, only had a paper document available. Often, these consisted of hand drawn maps (for evacuation procedures or location of exits and extinguishers) and notes. Also, it was common for libraries to say they keep only the one copy. While having a paper plan is better than not having one at all, there are many challenges associated with relying on one format and one copy. In the case of most disasters, anything made of fragile paper is destroyed. All of the time and effort put into creation could be gone in minutes, and the library would be left with no guidelines or contact information. It may also be physically impossible to reach the document due to the nature of the emergency. Also, a variety of organizations and individuals need to be called in the case of an emergency, and while 9-1-1 is a standard start to some emergencies, the phone number to hazardous materials coordinators or emergency alert radio stations are not. In addition, one copy prohibits multiple users and is useless to anyone outside of the library building. A simple solution would be to make several copies, storing them throughout the library and at the residences select employees. Scanning it is another good option for access, and making an electronic version also makes changes more manageable.

The remaining 77% of plan-holding libraries do have electronic copies. Half of these makes up the second group, or those with plans unavailable for public viewing or sharing. The central issue comes from library or county privacy policies: information found within a disaster plan usually includes personal telephone numbers for library and county personnel. In addition, they may contain building security specifics such as passwords, alarms codes, etc.
The other half of the 77% of libraries with electronic copies available for viewing was able to provide significant insight into disaster plans of Virginia’s public libraries. The thirteen collected plans were analyzed in two ways. First, they were examined for quantitative data, such as the number of pages, presence of a table of contents, and date of creation or date of last revision. Secondly, they were examined for content in regards to types of disasters covered, supplemental sections, and aspects of preparedness, response, and recovery.

As shown by the first chart, plans varied widely based on size alone. A little more than one-third of the plans were less than ten pages, another third contained between eleven and twenty pages, and the remaining third contained twenty-one pages or more. It was anticipated that any document with more than ten pages would have a table of contents, but this was not the case. Only four, which were more than ten pages, exhibited the feature. Another four (also more than ten pages) did not, including the one-hundred and eleven page and the forty-three page documents. The purpose of a table of contents is to aid the user in finding specific parts. This is especially important with large
documents, as it would take considerably longer to flip through to the desired section than to know what page it starts on. A table of contents also shows how something is organized, which provides an overview of included subjects at a glance. If a user is searching for information on how to handle a tornado warning, for example, they could tell whether or not to look elsewhere or continue to a certain page with the relevant instructions. Even more general headings, such as “man-made disasters” or “natural disasters” would provide an easier search than having to read through a lengthy document.

![Date of Creation or Last Update](image)

Plans also varied based on when they were created or last updated. More plans appeared to be created or revised within the past five years than expected, although it is hard to draw too many conclusions due to 30% of plans lacking any mention of a date. The absence could be purposeful, but it is not beneficial; it keeps the document from appearing outdated at a glance, but it makes it hard for staff to determine when revisit the plan in order to make necessary additions or changes.
Whether or not a table of contents or a recently updated version was provided, disaster plans were next examined for information on a range of disasters. Only disasters listed within the plans are featured in the following charts, so not all existing disasters (tsunamis, avalanches, volcanic eruptions, etc.) are present.

Overall, there were thirteen distinct man-made disasters mentioned. The most common one, arson and/or fire, appears in 77% of the plans. This is not surprising, since fires have many origins: ordinary combustibles (paper), flammable liquids (gasoline), flammable gases (natural gas), electrical equipment (machinery), combustible metals (titanium), and cooking oil or fat. Any libraries with a fireplace, staff kitchen, and/or old electrical work should be particularly mindful of including details about this disaster. It is also a problem for libraries whose plans indicated that there were no fire hydrants in close proximity to the building. Installing a sprinkler system is not always a clear choice, although even if the collection is lost to water damage, the building itself may be salvageable.
Bomb threats or explosions, medical emergencies, and power outages are the next predominate group, appearing in 62% of the plans. While the first situation certainly requires a call to 9-1-1 and evacuation of the library if possible, the other two may not, depending on the nature and severity of the emergency. Many people experience illnesses and power outages in their own homes and workplaces, so patrons may not be as alarmed during these disasters as during a bomb threat. Staff may also feel more prepared to address the latter two disasters due to familiarity. In any case, however, it is important for staff to know what to do in order to return the library to its normal service.

Plumbing problems or leaks, hazardous materials, robbery, and violence make up the next category of featured disasters. Surprisingly, water issues were included in less than half of the libraries (46%). Besides damage to the building and furnishing, water often leads to the growth of mold. Other than having a displeasing appearance, mold causes the deterioration of books and health problems such as headaches and skin irritation, which especially affects people with allergies or respiratory problems. If not treated properly, infected areas could see future outbreaks, leading to loss of part or all of a library’s collection. Hazardous materials, such as chemicals in a spill, may not appear often, but they should also be treated carefully. Robbery and violence both pertain to interactions amongst staff, patrons, and people inside or directly outside of the building. Theft, vandalism, threats, disruptive patrons, and activity pertaining to guns fall into this category. The safety of individuals is the top priority in these cases, but preventing the destruction of property is also important.

Heating and ventilation issues, natural gas leaks, structure failure, and terrorism link to some of the other man-made disasters mentioned, but they all pose unique threats.
Poor or broken heating and ventilation systems could lead to mold growth if the library becomes too humid. If windows are opened to circulate air, all manner of bugs, rodents, and weather gain easy access to materials. Expected shelf life of non-circulating materials may decrease without a controlled climate. Natural gas leaks may occur in libraries where gas is the source of heat. If systems or appliances are not properly maintained, leaks can cause carbon monoxide poisoning or explosions. It is important for staff to know how to identify a potential leak and get everyone in the building to safety.

Structural failure is another disaster that is not always an exclusive problem. It can be caused by other disasters, but it may also result from general wear-and-tear or as a result of the passage of time/age of structure. Some roofs, for example, only last about twenty to thirty years.

The least-mentioned man-made disaster, a power plant emergency, is not on the same level as the others. Inclusion in a library’s disaster plan should be determined by the proximity of a power plant to the library building. Understandably, if a library is outside of the range of potential danger caused by a power plant, it will not need to plan for such a disaster. Furthermore, total exclusion from the list would not have been astonishing. There are several coal and oil power plants, generally located in the North and East areas of the state, but Virginia has only two nuclear power plants.¹⁹

While man-made disasters can often be prevented through careful maintenance, safety procedures, and attention to details, nature disasters are usually much more unpredictable.

Overall, there were seven different natural disasters and one category where natural disasters were grouped together without distinction or specific instructions.

Earthquakes and tornados were the top featured disasters, and they were represented in 46% of plans. Considering the occurrence and range of impact of the two cause, it makes sense that a good number of plans would include them. Earthquakes are sudden and have the potential to create severe structural damage to buildings not designed to withstand the impact. In addition, large shelving units can turn from stationary objects into lethal hazards. Because tall furniture is the number one cause of death and injury in this disaster and can block escape routes\textsuperscript{20}, it is important to take height and weight into consideration when designing a space or ordering new units. A good practice is to secure anything heavy enough to cause injury if it fell from a high place, and this can apply to situations other than during an earthquake. Tornados also have an element of unpredictability. In most cases, meteorologists can determine if weather conditions favorably support the formation of funnels, so individuals and

organizations can have time to prepare. However, the path of a tornado can change in an instant, and its intensity and longevity are also hard to predict. Powerful winds, severe thunderstorms, and debris carried by the storm’s updraft are all dangers that should be known to staff.

Flooding followed close behind in occurrences, showing up in 38% of plans, and 23% of plans provided information about inclement weather and thunderstorms. Libraries built in flood plains of rivers are more at risk for damage than libraries in other locations, but there are other factors influencing service. For example, if roads are blocked and no one is able to reach the library, services reliant on the physical building are halted. Having an effective online presence may lessen the inconvenience for some patrons if circulation renewals and resources are available electronically. Inclement weather, such as snow storms, heavy winds, and extreme heat, also affect service. Thunderstorms are another example, although they usually are separated based on the specific risks associated with lightning strikes. They are also more common, although typically not as severe.

Hurricanes and natural disasters in general only came up in two plans. East-coast Virginia is no stranger to hurricanes, so it is surprising more libraries did not have plans or plans mentioning it. With hurricane season lasting from the beginning of June to the end of November every year and news reports relaying up-to-date information, there is no excuse for libraries to be unprepared. Even though libraries close during active times, it does not mean staff should not know how to respond. According to the National Hurricane Center, protecting areas where wind can enter the building is the most
important precaution you can take to reduce damage. Computers and equipment should also be protected in case of water entering the building. Again, having a plan describing natural disasters in general is better than having nothing at all, but lack of distinction between disasters is not very effective. As shown, they all have unique characteristics and appear in varying ways and seasons.

The least-mentioned natural disaster, similar to the power plant emergency, is not nearly as prominent. Landslides occur most often in areas with deep slopes and where modification of land has destroyed vegetation, and they can be caused by heavy rainfall and earthquakes. Similar to power plants and flooding, libraries can be built away from areas highly susceptible to this disaster.

Besides providing information on man-made and natural disasters, effective disaster plans include supplemental material. This includes items such as emergency phone numbers and a list of supplies.

Supplemental Material

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Telephone Numbers</th>
<th>Forms</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Salvage Priorities</th>
<th>Staff List</th>
<th>Supplies List</th>
<th>Unattended Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly 70% of plans included a purpose. A clear purpose is a great way to begin a disaster plan, as it can indicate the overall goal the library aims to meet and a scope of what will be covered. Safety, protection, and response to emergencies are common words used in each statement. Although it may seem obvious why a disaster plan was created, it also serves to aid in the creation of the document. Knowing whether or not to include certain information, and in how much detail, are dependent upon the overall goal. For instance, pocket disaster plans or quick tip sheets are likely to sacrifice detail for a list of the most common emergencies, evacuation procedures, and phone numbers. Manuals, on the other hand, will include the same elements, but they will be discussed in greater depth.

Telephone numbers and forms are the next set of prominent information found in 62% and 54% of plans respectively. The former includes emergency and non-emergency numbers of staff, local fire and police organizations, power companies, etc. The latter was mostly bomb threat reports, but accident reports, insurance forms, and inspection checklists were also included. These remind staff of important things to look for or ask during a disaster, and it helps them remember important details for later review or for sharing with emergency personnel when they arrive onsite.

Although not a man-made or natural disaster, 38% of libraries included information about how to respond to an unattended child situation. Children could easily get separated from their caregivers as a result of a disaster or in the process of an evacuation, so its presence makes sense.

Lists of supplies, staff members, and salvage priorities made an appearance in only a few plans. A few factors could account for the low number. Unlike the purpose or
sample forms, these categories require more updating. Supplies are used, staff members retire/move or new staff is hired, and collections change and grow. For example, a plan might reflect the time period when cassette and VHS tapes were collected. As a result, CDs and DVDs are missing from the priorities section. Staff may also not agree on the precedence of items to be salvaged.

All of the above, along with the man-made and natural disaster analysis, clearly illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of Virginia’s disaster plans. A broader way to look at them is through the three main aspects of disaster planning preparedness, response, and recovery.

Overall, the aspects appeared as predicted. Every plan contained one or more sections about responding to disasters. In other words, staff could look to the document for what to do when a disaster strikes. This is certainly important, especially when trying to protect patrons, staff, and collections. Improvement can still be made, though. As the charts illustrate, not all libraries were prepared for more than a few disasters. Filling in
the gaps and providing detailed response sections would be very beneficial. Adding a list of emergency telephone numbers would also help make the plans stronger.

However, prevention is equally important, although it was only discussed in barely over half of the documents (53%). It makes a difference when a library is prepared for a disaster rather than solely reacting to it. For instance, securing shelves, providing regular building maintenance, and stocking supplies can minimize the chance of the heavy furniture injuring an individual, the roof leaking during a severe storm, or running out of first aid necessities. Performing drills and establishing relationships with appropriate supportive services are also beneficial, because staff becomes aware of the procedures and services available and will not need to rely so heavily on the manual for step-by-step instructions. Designating a team of people to be in charge during emergencies is yet another method of preparation. Instead of everyone (or no one) trying to give instructions and direction, people will know who to look to. One library gives such leaders a brightly-colored vest to wear for visibility. Since time is of the essence, any step taken to minimize damage and confusion is valuable.

Even with numerous preventative measures, libraries cannot anticipate everything for every situation. Recovering from a disaster is the third important part of planning, but it was the least mentioned, showing up in only 38% of documents. One example of a recovery section is one describing available funds and outlining the necessary authorizations and other procedures for using them (such as cash, purchase orders, and requisitions). In cases where water has damaged the collection, contacting freeze drying and water extraction services as soon as possible is fundamental to saving affected materials. Having the numbers on file for the related companies and following the
salvaging priorities checklist make this part easier, which shows how all three aspects are interrelated.

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER STUDY

Because of the method used to collect data, the research faces limitations. For instance, the person answering the phone, chat, or email may not have given the correct information or may not have been able to provide the needed information; they may be unaware of the existence of a disaster plan for their library, or they may not feel comfortable sharing documents. Some willing participants were also unable to send documents electronically, because they did not own a scanner or similar device. Speaking with library administration helped to alleviate some of the challenges, but library directors or building coordinators were not always available during the time frame when data was collected. The number of respondents also has an effect on the result; fewer respondents may give quality information, but it may not be enough to transfer all conclusions to public libraries throughout the state.

To make the research more extensive, one could obtain clear responses from every public library in Virginia instead of relying on a small sample. Also, obtaining and analyzing disaster plans not available electronically would provide further insights. Another approach would be to examine libraries affected by disasters to see if they had a plan in place before and/or after. Drawing comparisons between Virginia public libraries and other states, private libraries, and businesses holds the potential for even more levels in assessing and analyzing disaster plans.
CONCLUSION

A single document, coupled with strong community relationships, can go a long way in saving a public library’s collection and services from destructive forces of nature. Libraries cannot stop disasters from occurring, but literature and experience suggest that they can lessen the impact of damage. In order to do so, Virginia public libraries need to create effective disaster plans, with preparedness, response, and recovery playing equal parts. If one area is lacking, the plan can be ineffective. For example, libraries that provide necessary equipment to extinguish a fire may still suffer from lack of leadership and training. Physical damage may be minor, but emotional damage can lead to high levels of stress. Overall, libraries serve a significant role in their community, so it is important that the libraries of Virginia create a plan or fill in the gaps of their existing plans revealed through this study. By having an effective disaster plan in place, they could recover more quickly, or even be able maintain service levels and structure, than a public library without such a plan in place.
REFERENCES


