



A Call to Action on MayDay

Protecting our collections is one of our fundamental responsibilities as archivists. The Heritage Health Index, released in 2005 soon after hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma struck the Gulf Coast, reported that few institutions have disaster plans and for those that do, often the plan is out of date. It's easy to put off emergency response planning as we devote our attentions to tasks with more immediate "payback."

But on May 1 – this year and *every* year – you can do *something* that will make a difference when and if an emergency occurs. That's the purpose of MayDay – a grassroots effort whose goal is to save our archives.

MayDay is a time when archivists and other cultural heritage professionals take personal and professional responsibility for doing something simple – something that can be accomplished in a day but that can have a significant impact on an individual's or a repository's ability to respond.

Individuals can do many things on their own: For example, set aside time to read key policy documents once again, just to keep the information fresh. Quickly survey collections areas to ensure that nothing is stored directly on the floor, where it would be especially vulnerable to water damage. Note the location of fire exits and fire extinguishers. Encourage your repository to participate in MayDay.

Repositories may engage in activities involving all staff: For example, conduct an evacuation drill to acquaint staff members with the evacuation plan and to test its effectiveness. Or update the contact information in your existing emergency preparedness plan and create a wallet-size emergency contact roster to facilitate communication and rapid response.

The following list includes a number of simple MayDay activities that can help you respond to an emergency when and if it occurs. You should adapt them to those hazards that you're most likely to face: a repository in San Francisco might plan an earthquake drill, while another in Georgia might plan for a hurricane. The most important thing is to do *something* on MayDay that will help save our archives.

If you come up with other activities, we'd like to add them to the list. Please send information to the Society of American Archivists at MayDay@archivists.org so that we may share it with others. We'd also like to track who has participated in MayDay activities and what you did. If you or your repository conducts MayDay exercises, please send a note to the same address.

Ideas for MayDay Activities

Create or Update Your Contact Lists

One of the most important elements of disaster response is knowing how to contact critical people – emergency responders, staff, and vendors. Make sure your staff members have an up-to-date list that includes as much contact information as possible: work and home phone numbers (including direct lines at work), mobile phone numbers, work and home email addresses, and any other relevant addresses. Staff at many institutions hit by hurricanes in 2005 discovered that they couldn't use work email or phone numbers because work systems were completely out of commission; those who had an alternative phone number or email address often could connect.

- Create or update a master list for key people to keep at home.
- Create or update a list of staff members that is small enough to be kept in a pocket or a wallet.
- Create or update a list of key vendors.

Review or Establish Basic Emergency Procedures

Staff members need to know basic procedures and have essential information where it's readily available when there's an emergency. All staff members should have copies of the procedures that they can keep by their phones, at home, and in their cars. SAA has adapted an [outline for basic emergency procedures](http://www.archivists.org/mayday/MayDayEmergencyProcedures.rtf) <http://www.archivists.org/mayday/MayDayEmergencyProcedures.rtf> that can be used as a template to develop your own.

- Review or develop basic emergency procedures.
- Distribute copies of up-to-date procedures to all staff.
- Make sure all staff members read the procedures.

Conduct a Disaster Drill

Different archives face different threats. Any repository could have a fire. Those on the Gulf and Atlantic coasts are threatened by hurricanes; those in the Midwest, by tornadoes; and those in the West, by earthquakes. These types of disasters often strike with little warning, so it's critically important that staff members know how to respond immediately. There's no time to plan when you have to evacuate a burning building! A disaster drill will help remind your staff of the proper procedures, and can also reveal unanticipated problems that can then be corrected.

Disaster drills are often difficult to execute because they interrupt public service. If you can't perform a full-fledged drill, have a "silent drill." Identify a skeleton staff group who will remain on duty to provide public service while the rest of the staff conduct the exercise.

- Make sure that staff members know where fire alarms and fire extinguishers are located.
- Make sure that all staff can point to at least two emergency exit routes.

Conduct Scenario Exercises

In every emergency, staff members face unexpected circumstances. Scenario exercises offer them a chance to think about how they would respond to situations that would be hard to incorporate into a drill, and the exercises are particularly helpful for those who have specific responsibilities for dealing with disasters. What would you do if someone pulled a gun in the reading room? What would you do if the toilet started to overflow? If a major storm after hours causes significant damage to buildings in the area, do you come to work? You receive a call at night that there's been a break in; what do you do? Your supervisor is out of town; who do you call?

- Form small groups to discuss how to respond to different kinds of emergencies.

Invite Your Local Firefighters to Visit Your Repository

Firefighters' first responsibility is to put out fires. But they are also sensitive to the property they are protecting. Fire safety professionals often offer advice on safety procedures and training on how to prevent fires and how to use fire extinguishers.

- Invite your local fire safety professional to visit your repository in order to become familiar with your facility and to consider how to fight any fires effectively.

Survey the Building for Risks

Inspect the condition of your facility, with an eye to identifying possible hazards.

- Check the roof, including drains and gutters.
- Look for trees and plants growing close to the building.
- Check wiring for overloaded circuits, and look for appliances (such as space heaters, coffee pots, and office machines) that may be unauthorized or in poor condition.
- Test the fire detection system and emergency lighting.
- Check to make sure fire extinguishers are charged.
- Inspect pipes and ventilation ducts.
- Ensure that access to emergency exits is unobstructed.

Make Sure All Collections Are in Boxes

If you have a fire, your collections are at risk from water or smoke damage. Boxes do more than serve as a storage container; they provide protection. In case of a fire, boxes provide a barrier against smoke. As important, winds generated by a fire won't pick up loose items to feed the flames. Boxes also protect materials from water due to sprinklers, broken pipes, or leaks.

- Look for loose and unboxed materials – and make a plan to get the boxing done.

Make Sure Boxes Are Off the Floor

Any number of causes – a broken pipe, a clogged toilet, fire sprinklers – may result in water in your storage areas. If shelf space is limited, use pallets for clearance.

- Make sure nothing is on the floor where it can be soaked.

Identify the Most Critical, Essential, Important Records

In some cases, you may have a chance to move some items to a more secure location. Do you know what you'd take with you? In addition to your holdings, what administrative records (such as computer backup tapes) might you take?

- Create a prioritized list of collections.

Inventory Emergency Supplies

Check to make sure that you have what you need in case of an emergency, such as a well-stocked first aid kit, flashlights with glow-in-the-dark tape, and large rolls of plastic sheeting with ropes and clips to tent collections. Check to see that you have materials to begin salvage operations, such as buckets and mops, fans, respirators, extension cords, garbage bags, disinfectant, a camera with flash and film to document damage, and a water vacuum.

- Order supplies to replenish stock.

Review Your Emergency Preparedness Plan

Creating – or even revising – an emergency preparedness plan takes more than a day. But on MayDay you could develop a strategy for updating your existing plan.

- Read your current plan and identify what should be updated.
- Set target deadlines to accomplish key steps.
- Schedule a little time each week to work on your plan.

If Your Repository Doesn't Have an Emergency Preparedness Plan . . .

... MayDay is a good time to get started. Don't expect that your plan will be finished on May 1! Use this day to set a timeline to complete your plan before MayDay 2007.

Check websites and books to familiarize yourself with what needs to be done. You may want to visit one or more of the following websites for information and ideas about preparing a plan:

- Heritage Preservation (www.heritagepreservation.org) is a great place to start. Heritage Preservation's *Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel* provides "Action Steps" (outlining critical stages of disaster response, such as stabilizing the environment and assessing damage) and "Salvage Steps" (practical tips for different types of collections). Heritage Preservation will issue *Field Guide to Emergency Response* in May 2006. Check the website for details.
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides "Emergency Response Actions Steps" on its website at www.fema.gov/ehp/ers_wl.shtml.
- The Northeast Document Conservation Center (www.nedcc.org) publishes a series of Emergency Management Technical Leaflets that provide information on disaster planning and recovery, as well as other valuable resources.

YOU CAN HELP "SAVE OUR ARCHIVES" BY PARTICIPATING IN MAYDAY 2006!