

CHALLENGES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS: NATIONAL EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE & RECOVERY

by Debra Hess Norris

In the past 2 years, the world has witnessed swift and staggering losses to our global heritage caused by natural and man-made disasters. Recent examples of these national disasters include the 2007 fire at the Georgetown Library of Washington, D.C., the 2008 Plympton Library fire in Plympton, Massachusetts, and catastrophic flooding of the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library in Cedar Rapids, Iowa [Fig. 1]. Moreover, the threat to our global cultural heritage extends internationally: the 2007 earthquake at the Gisborne Library in Gisborne, New Zealand, and the 2009 archives collapse in Cologne, Germany [Fig. 2], are only two to mention.



Photo courtesy: Jim Watts

Figure 2: Archives collapse in Cologne, Germany, in March 2009



Photo courtesy: Perry Walton/P&N Air

Figure 1: The National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in Summer 2008

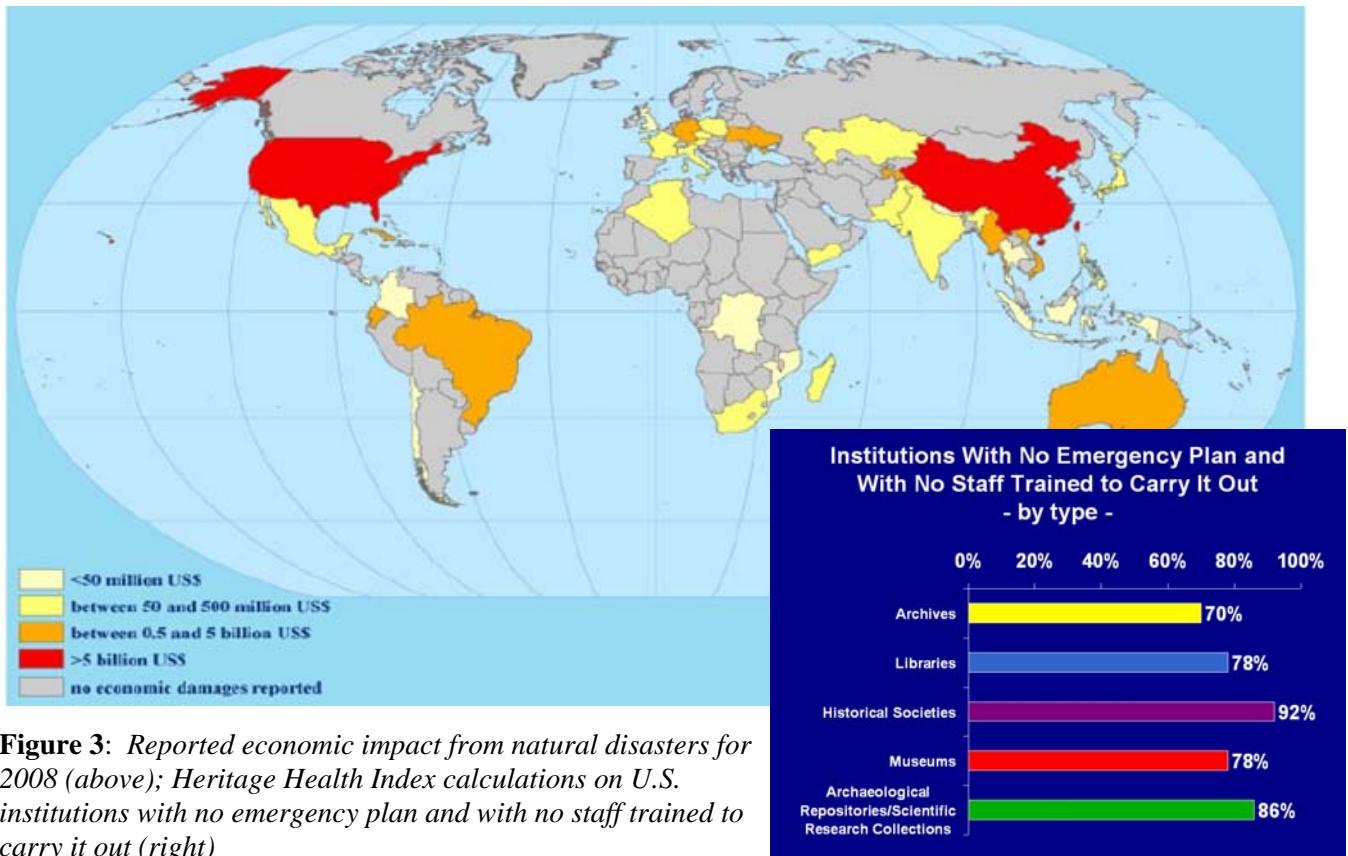


Figure 3: *Reported economic impact from natural disasters for 2008 (above); Heritage Health Index calculations on U.S. institutions with no emergency plan and with no staff trained to carry it out (right)*

The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), in Brussels, tracks the frequency and severity of emergency occurrences and compiles data on global disaster impact.

In the United States, financial losses peaked in 2005 with Hurricane Katrina at a reported 220 billion dollars of damage. The chart [Fig. 3] documents reported economic impact from natural disasters in 2008. Despite such comprehensive data, it remains impossible to estimate the value of lost cultural heritage from these disasters.

Released in 2004, the Heritage Health Index (HHI) became the first comprehensive survey of the U.S. collections' state of preservation held in public trust. Heritage Preservation worked in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services to develop, implement, and plan this initiative with the help of 35 associations and federal agencies. These services distributed the HHI survey to over “14,500 archives, libraries, historical societies,

museums, archaeological repositories, and historic research collections of all sizes from every U.S. state and territory” (Heritage Preservation). The HHI reveals pressing national needs relating to collections’ environment, storage, staffing, funding, and emergency preparedness and planning. The survey estimates that 2.6 billion items of historic cultural and scientific significance are not protected by an emergency plan and, therefore, remain at risk if a disaster strikes. Unfortunately, there are many institutions with neither an emergency plan nor the staff to carry it out. As detailed in Figure 3, 92% of the historical societies in the United States and U.S. territories did not have an emergency plan or the staff trained to carry it out; 70 % of the archives and libraries face similar challenges.

Considerable emergency planning, preparedness, and mitigation work remains. Our national efforts must continue to focus on assisting cultural institution and private individuals. A variety of national initiatives and actions have been taken to prepare for and

mitigate against natural and man-made disasters during the past 15 years. The 2005 U.S. hurricane season—specifically, Hurricane Katrina—provided overwhelming evidence that better coordinated action *must* be taken immediately by cultural institutions to be adequately prepared and protected from immediate loss of collections. From these events, conservation and allied professionals have learned about the practicalities and emerging needs associated with emergency response, preparedness, and recovery.

As a response to the 1993 Midwest floods, the Heritage Emergency National Task Force was established in 1995. The Task Force provides expert information and facilitates effective and coordinated disaster response and salvage assistance to institutions and the public. The Task Force has representatives from many governmental agencies, including the Department of the Army, Library of Congress, National Park Service, Smithsonian Institution, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, Institute of Museum and Library Services, American Association for Museums, American Institute of Architects, American Institute for Conservation, and the National Trust. Administered by Heritage Preservation and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), its 40+ members are firmly committed to the preservation of cultural heritage and addressing the nation's challenges through emergency response, preparedness, and recovery. The Getty Conservation Institute was instrumental in the establishment of the Heritage Emergency National Task Force in the mid 1990s and continues to offer nationwide resources of information, expertise, and assistance.

Most specifically, the Task Force is designed to help cultural institutions and public audiences to be better prepared and to secure resources when disasters strike. The Task Force works to establish protocols to respond to region-wide and presidentially declared disasters. Primary goals include: (1) offering incentives to

institutions for disaster preparedness, (2) providing information tools and trainings for cultural heritage, (3) coordinating response to major disasters, (4) giving advice to the public, and (5) promoting strategic alliances with emergency responders. When disasters are imminent, this group assembles virtually through e-mail or conference calls. In addition, they meet annually in Washington, D.C., to ensure the best possible preparedness for disasters.

Perhaps one of the best outcomes that emerged from the Task Force's work is the creation of practical educational tools, including the *Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel* [Fig.4] and the *Field Guide to Emergency Response*.



Figure 4: *Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel*

The *Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel* is a two-sided interactive construction that documents action steps on one side and salvage steps on the other.

This information, now translated into six languages, details how to recover a wide variety of materials, such as natural history

collections, paintings, photographs, archival materials, and electronic records. The *Field Guide to Emergency Response* is a set of simplified and accurate response instructions assembled in a spiral format. This publication includes customized information tabs and an instructional DVD that demonstrates basic salvage techniques and can be viewed using a laptop computer on site.¹

Predicated on the concept that “smart” money is spent on preparedness, Heritage Preservation has developed a pilot risk evaluation and planning program funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. This program – currently focused on fifteen institutions in Ohio, Texas, and Louisiana – involves a team of conservation and emergency response professionals who assist small to mid-sized institutions with comprehensive risk evaluation. Such planning is the fundamental first step in the development of a site-specific emergency plan. Heritage Preservation is now receiving emergency plans from these institutions. While a formal evaluation of the pilot is ongoing, some aspects are immediately evident. First, emergency planning is possible with a little encouragement and simple guidelines. Second, the value of protecting cultural heritage within communities from disasters is apparent, and emergency responders are eager to learn more. Finally, museums with few resources can still take inexpensive and effective disaster mitigation steps. It is hoped that this pilot will serve as a national and international model for future funding and emergency planning efforts.

Building a sustained partnership between conservation professionals and emergency response communities ensures that cultural heritage will be well protected against disasters. This involves the responsibility to: (1) raise awareness of the pressing need to protect cultural and historic resources, (2) initiate a dialogue with emergency responders city-wide, (3) build and sustain local networks, and (4)

develop strategic partnerships to integrate cultural heritage into local emergency plans.

The Alliance for Response, established in 2003, is a national initiative that focuses on cultural heritage and disaster management through local forums and cities. As of spring 2009, this innovative program has been held in twelve cities across the nation. Two examples of the Alliance’s effectiveness are: (1) the Philadelphia Alliance for Response is working with the city’s Emergency Management Office on an emergency alert system and credentialing for cultural heritage personnel, and (2) the New York City Alliance for Response will be cosponsoring information and training programs with the city’s Office of Emergency Management. The benefits of this strategic partnership are clear.

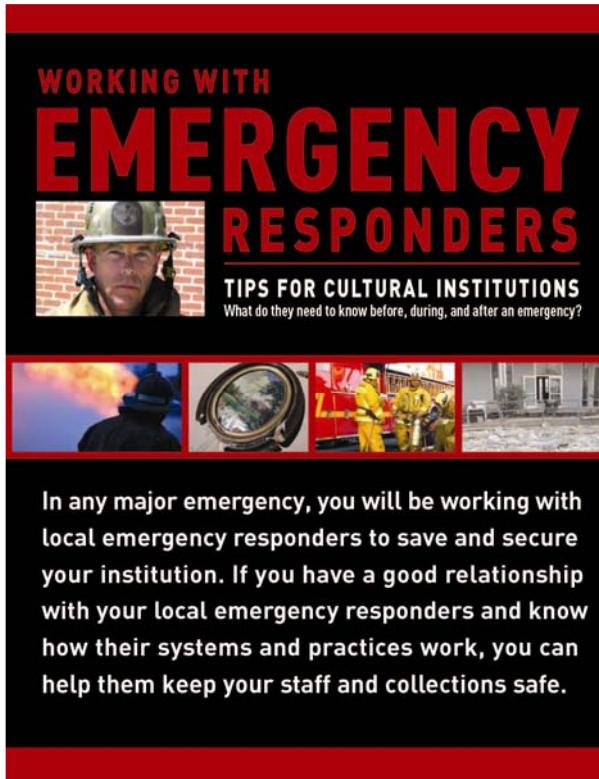
Effective dialogue has resulted in the development of additional tools for improved disaster response. For example, a poster [Fig. 5] provides a series of strategies or tips on how to work effectively and efficiently with emergency responders.² These tips include understanding the chain of command, identifying ways your institution can help with region-wide disasters by offering lodging or classroom facilities, hosting an emergency responders’ appreciation night, organizing a table-top exercise with a local emergency management agency, appointing cultural heritage liaisons, and providing blueprints for collections. Fostering strong partnerships with city and county emergency responders is essential for the safety of collections and staff.

The Council of State Archivists (CoSA) and The Society of American Archivists (SAA) have also assisted with the development of a framework for emergency response. In collaboration with the National Archives and Records Administration, CoSA has developed a practical, two-sided Pocket Response Plan

1. For more information and details about the Heritage Preservation National Task Force and its tools, visit <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/PROGRAMS/TASKFER.HTM>

2. To see a more detailed list of strategies or tips on how to work effectively with emergency responders, visit <https://www.heritagepreservation.org/catalog/product.asp?intProdID=39>

(PReP). This document is printed on Tyvek or other spunbonded polyethylene that is waterproof. One side of the plan contains an Emergency Communication Directory with contact information for staff, first responders, emergency services, utilities, vendors, and suppliers. The other side includes an Emergency Response Checklist – an organized list of actions that each individual should take in the first 24 to 72 hours following a disaster.



This pocket-sized plan is simple and elegant.

MayDay encourages organizations internationally to take one simple step to protect artifacts they hold in trust each MayDay, every year. Established by the Society of American Archivists in 2006, the goals of MayDay have been expanded by Heritage Preservation to include all collecting repositories. MayDay 2009 was featured by FEMA on their Website. Some 2009 MayDay participants and their achievements include:

- Isle of Wright County Museum in Smithfield, Virginia
 - disaster plans were updated and reviewed by local Department of Emergency Planning after experiencing a major flood
- Bluffton Library Branch in Beaufort County, South Carolina
 - hosted a hands-on disaster preparedness and recovery workshop
- The University of Utah in Salt Lake City, Utah
 - sponsored a luncheon that focused on advances in earthquake preparedness and their impact on the preservation of the university's collections

Intergovernmental Preparedness for Essential Records (IPER) is a project administered by CoSA and funded by FEMA that develops and delivers state and local government training designed to protect records before, during, and after disasters. A special focus of this training is on records that are essential to the resumption of government operations, although the protection of historic records is also a significant goal.



Many other national and regional organizations offer fundamental assistance with emergency response and recovery. The Regional Alliance for Preservation is a consortium of 15 national organizations across the United States that provides resources for planning, response, preparedness, technical support, online printed materials, and regional workshops.³ An especially useful online disaster planning tool is the dPlan template developed by the Northeast Document Conservation Center and now being simplified for smaller institutions. In addition, some institutions within the Regional Alliance for Response provide 24-hour contact and freeze-drying capabilities.



The American Institute for Conservation (AIC) has established collections emergency response teams (AIC-CERT) that include 60+ individuals who have been carefully selected and well-trained. All members are trained in the same body of knowledge, familiar with the Incident Command System, and available via a 24/7 hotline administered by AIC. AIC-CERT members assess damage and initiate safe salvage of cultural collections. These conservators are carefully selected to bring expertise in a variety of disciplines and are

expected to make a committed effort to respond to emergencies when requested by AIC. They have been enormously effective. These responders have identified immediate challenges with emergency response: (1) the lack of disaster plans; (2) the absence of financial and human resources, especially in small institutions, to respond adequately; and (3) the lack of education. In the absence of good information, people are too quick to discard materials that could be salvaged.

The following commentary was offered by AIC-CERT members in regard to an e-mail query regarding some of the most immediate challenges:

“On the national level, we must discuss standards for drying out buildings with collections and methods used for decontamination.”

--Nancy Kraft, University of Iowa Libraries

“Even if ‘a stitch in time saves nine,’ who sews?”

--Randy Silverman, University of Utah

“Comprehensive planning for disasters cannot be overemphasized. Institutions with serious plans and professional staff had fewer problems coping with recovery. Communication issues consistently cause delay in recovery efforts.”

--Steve Pine, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas

3. Learn more about the Regional Alliance for Preservation at <http://www.rap-arcc.org/>

Education and training in disaster response and planning are essential to our cultural heritage. The benefits of such outreach were demonstrated with the Hurricane Katrina disaster. Through a grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the University of Delaware partnered with graduate conservation education programs in North America and cultural institutions in Biloxi, Mississippi, to facilitate a 2-year coordinated effort to salvage damaged cultural heritage. A hired on-site conservator purchased supplies and equipment and coordinated all activities. In addition, eight response teams, composed of faculty, conservation professionals, and students, were sent to the Mississippi Gulf Coast to help. One of the many cultural projects in Biloxi was Beauvoir, the home of Jefferson Davis situated on the Gulf Coast. As part of this project, twelve recovery workshops for cultural

institutions and the public were hosted. Most importantly, summer work projects were organized for fifteen graduate and undergraduate students. Not only did this project assist colleagues on the Gulf Coast, but it also educated and trained future conservators about the issues associated with disaster response and recovery. Many objects were collected for conservation treatment by students in graduate programs, including an 1898 portrait of Winnie Davis [Fig. 8], Jefferson Davis' daughter, examined and treated by Amber Kerr-Allison as well as other University of Delaware and other conservation program graduate and undergraduate students. This project provided an opportunity for students to learn how to stabilize and preserve salvaged materials. The challenges are immense, and such training is essential.



Figure 8a,b: During and After treatment of 1898 Winnie Davis portrait that was recovered from the Hurricane Katrina disaster and treated by University of Delaware and Winterthur Museum art conservation graduates and undergraduates

First, the Task Force's framework provides an administrative center, articulated structure, and a focus within which all member organizations are working hard toward common goals. In addition, simple communication is essential.

Furthermore, imagination and vision are always important. Finally, building a community and pure strength in numbers are necessary and have clearly advanced and strengthened our effort.

There are still many challenges ahead, including the need to (1) ensure that institutions are

properly incentivized for preparedness and have established institutional priorities; (2) integrate architectural emergency planning expertise, as noted by AIC-CERT responders; (3) infuse timely and sufficient funding for the stabilization of collections; (4) research efficient and safe recovery and response processes and procedures; and (5) create comprehensive communication strategies.

What are the trends and future needs? (1) Most importantly, ensuring that scientific research on mitigation and recovery methods continues; (2) reaching out to responders, which has proven to be successful and fundamental to our efforts; (3) creating local disaster assistance networks, because much of this has to be done on the local level; and (4) simplifying planning, increasing awareness, and developing greater and better collection inventories and emphasis on prioritization.

The initiatives mentioned above may be modeled and adopted globally. One day, our

nation will work effectively in tandem with our international colleagues to preserve our collective cultural heritage and to educate future generations of conservation

professionals and emergency responders.

Like Jake WollfARTH [Fig. 9], I believe that our future is promising. Many organizations, federal agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals have generously supported, formulated, and led the initiatives mentioned above.

Promoting education, scientific research, collaboration, and partnership will enable us to best protect cultural heritage from emergencies. Much has been accomplished, yet there still remains

considerable work to ensure the safety and preservation of our cultural heritage—both national and international—against disasters. We are in this together. We have much to accomplish.

Sincerest thanks to the funding organizations that made the disaster response and recovery projects detailed in this presentation possible, especially the National Endowment for the Humanities, Institute of Museum and Library Services, Fidelity Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, Munters, Federal Emergency Management Agency, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, the Getty Foundation, the National Park Services, and a large number of local supporters.

Many thanks to the collaborative efforts of disaster responders who strive to preserve our cultural heritage, some of which include Heritage Preservation (and especially Jane

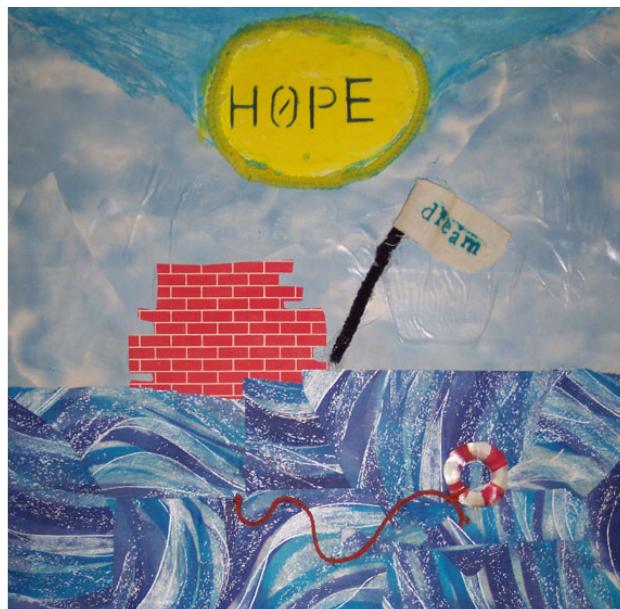


Figure 9: Collage by 5th grader, Jake WollfARTH of New Orleans, following the Hurricane Katrina disaster

Long for her assistance with this paper), the Center for Research of the Epidemiology of Disasters, Heritage Emergency National Task Force, Council of State Archivists, Regional Alliance for Response, American Institute for Conservation, and a number of local supporters. We are grateful for your support and endeavors to save our cultural heritage for present and future generations.

Bibliography

“Heritage Preservation: Ensuring the preservation of America’s cultural heritage”. Heritage Preservation: The National Institute for Conservation. 2009. Heritage Preservation. 3 Aug. 2009 <<http://www.heritagepreservation.org>>.