

## Tips on Disaster Prevention, Preparedness, and Recovery

*If your parish office does not already have a disaster plan for the church, hall and rectory, here are some basic tips:*

### 1. Disaster Prevention

#### Daily storage, display and usage of records and artifacts:

- Always practice safe care and handling; use sufficient and stable supports, keep food and drink away from records and artifacts.
- Whenever possible, exhibit a copy: *always supervise visitors.*  
*Lock storage areas when not in use*
- Monitor the conditions of the storage and usage space:
  - Make fire extinguishers easy to find; test and replace regularly.
  - Test smoke alarms and replace batteries regularly (sprinkler systems are not recommended for areas where valuable items damageable by water are stored.)
  - Dust and clean regularly.
- Know your environment -- avoid leaving valuable records and objects exposed or stored near heating ducts, direct light, open doors, etc.; minimize light exposure, avoid extreme fluctuation in temperature, but ventilate regularly.
- Use silica gel crystals if necessary to regulate the HUMIDITY within boxes, cabinets, safes and vaults. *(Unfortunately, fireproof vaults do not keep out dampness and are a breeding ground for mould and fungi if not placed in a dry room and ventilated regularly)*

### 2. Emergency Preparedness

*"...it is more important to have a simple plan in place than to have the perfect plan in preparation."*  
Connie Brooks

#### Examples of Disasters: Natural or human-related

- Fire, Miner's Museum in Glace Bay, 1980; suspected arson
- Fire, Weldon Law Library at Dalhousie University in Halifax, 1985; caused by electrical fault, damaged 250,000 books
- Flood, Dartmouth Heritage Museum, 1993; pipes, radiator burst
- Fire, SL George's Church in Halifax, 1994
- Fire destroyed Green Gables National Historic Site in 1997
- Fire, St. John's Anglican Church, Lunenburg, 2001; arson
- **Hurricane Juan, Sept. 2003:** Tree fell a few inches short of entering the Bishop's office window – no damage. *HOWEVER:* Part of the Cathedral roof blew off causing massive water damage inside the church; Cathedral basement had about 2" of water seepage; heavy rain also came into the Diocesan Centre through a leak in the roof damaging walls, floors and a good part of the Resource Library collection. Three months later, records stored in the Cathedral basement had sustained water absorption damage.

#### **Disaster Effects:** Disasters can be sudden or slow -- *Often one disaster creates another...*

- Fire brings water, smoke and/or chemical damage
- Wind can bring rain and flooding; hurricane wind can break windows and tear off roofs
- Power outages and extreme cold weather can bring dampness and freezing, breaking pipes, etc
- Water can bring electrical problems; even a small amount of residual water can be absorbed by plaster, wood, and paper, attracting vermin and causing mould and fungi to grow.

**Avoid potential disasters and their costs:**

- *Assess the risks in and around your church, hall, rectory and other storage areas from -- Fire -- Water -- Physical forces -- Criminal activity -- Pests – Contaminants. Tall trees without foliage or covered in lichen are the most likely to blow over in a severe wind.*
- *Keep insurance up to date – include cost of recovery supplies, equipment and services.*
- *Take inventory; assess value of records, furnishings and artifacts. Take “before” pictures to be compared with “after” pictures.*
- *Have ready to use: a Disaster Kit and Disaster Plan in the form of a simple manual; give copies to everyone on the response team.*

**Disaster Plan Contents:**

- Contact Information: **Disaster Recovery Team**; Insurance activating agent
- Disaster Recovery Procedure: Step by step procedures for each type of disaster
- Safety equipment and supply list – stating how and why they are used
- Health and safety procedures
- Immediate Response Treatments: step by step procedures for each type of artifact
- **Appendices to the Disaster Plan include:**
  - Floor plans showing:
    - Where records are stored: major furniture, anything of value to be saved; indicate doorways and windows clearly.
    - Numbered cabinets and shelving units
    - KEY: a numbered list describing contents of records storage units and codes (use colour or letters) for priority in recovery.
  - Emergency assistance telephone numbers
  - Lists of supplies and suppliers
  - Location of supplies and equipment stored on the property
  - Lists of services and facilities (update periodically)
  - Other important checklists

**3. Disaster Management: Basic Response Procedures:**

- Evaluate the threat and evacuate if necessary
- Call the appropriate emergency services
- Organize your manpower into task oriented teams
- Secure the building and restrict access
- Take pictures of the affected area; get as much detail as possible. Most insurance is based on the replacement value; with paper records, only the cost of recovery may be insured. Activate your insurance by calling the appropriate number immediately -- determined beforehand and have in disaster manual.
- Assess damage, stabilize the environment, protect and salvage the records (remove to another space for treatment if time allows).

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**ALWAYS** take proper safety precautions FIRST. ***Remember, the safety of the church staff, recovery team and parishioners is the most important consideration in any sudden emergency situation.***

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## **Emergency Equipment**

*(Don't forget the camera for insurance reference – a digital camera allows unlimited pictures; take pictures quickly before you clean -- and after)*

### **For the "big" cleaning, drying, organizing and self-protecting:**

- Dust masks and respirator.
  - Rubber gloves and rubber boots
  - Pails, mops and sponges;
  - Brushes, brooms and squeegees
  - Ladder
  - Rope, tape, and bungee cords
  - Plastic and cotton sheeting
  - Terry towels and paper towels; plastic bags, large plastic totes with handles and air holes.
  - Tools: scissors and knives, screwdrivers, hammers
  - Shovels
  - Radio, battery powered
  - Portable oscillating fans, humidifier, dehumidifier
  - Stationery items, tags and labels
  - Extension cords, flashlights, batteries (new)
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### **Additional Supplies**

- ♦ Work tables and chairs
  - ♦ Plastic crates, trays, and boxes; milk crates and bread trays are ideal
  - ♦ Emergency generator and lighting
  - ♦ Tarpaulins
  - ♦ Sump pumps
  - ♦ Vacuum cleaners
  - ♦ Trolleys and carts
  - ♦ Industrial wet/dry vacuums
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### **Create a DISASTER KIT to have on-site at all times ready to use:**

Use a large plastic tub (Rubbermaid) for your kit.

Clearly label it as the Disaster Kit

- Some supplies include:
  - first aid kit, actual kits may be expensive...make your own in a little plastic box
  - dust masks and/or respirators
  - rubber gloves (some thin latex and some heavy duty)
  - Polyethylene drop cloths (paint stores and building supply stores)
  - sponge, mops and buckets, Teflon spatulas, freezer paper, scissors
  - flashlights and batteries
  - extension cords
  - stationery items: paper, pens, pencils for note-taking and labeling, sticky labels.

*Compiled by the Archives of NS and PEI from Paula French's Conservation Workshop handout and "a Manual for Small Archives".*