



Australian  
Library and  
Information  
Association

# **ALIA** Guide to **Disaster Planning, Response and Recovery for libraries**

May 2010



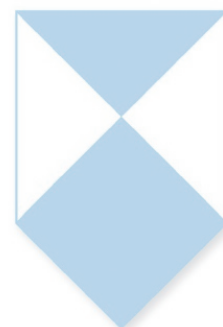
**Blue  
Shield  
Australia**

ALIA is a member of Blue Shield Australia



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Disasters and emergencies come in many different forms.

Libraries can find their premises, collections, staff and users under threat, in the case of a fire in the building or a violent intruder. They can be part of a bigger disaster, for example a flood, not only damaging the building and contents, but also affecting the wider area. They can emerge unscathed from a disaster and become part of the essential support service afterwards, as happened in the 2009 Victorian bushfires.

This guide covers each of these eventualities and the four stages of a disaster:

1. Prevention
2. Preparation
3. Response
4. Recovery

Each library will be different, each situation unique, but using the approach we outline will help you plan your own disaster response. These notes can be used in tandem with the *ALIA Disaster Planning for Libraries* template.

We have deliberately kept the document brief and to the point, providing the basics for any library – school, public, mobile, government, special or university. Although concise, our guide is based on a review of the literature produced by other Australian and international organisations, best practice among cultural institutions, and the experience of libraries in recent bushfires and floods.

We have sought advice from various organisations and there is a full listing of sources for anyone who requires more in-depth information about any aspect of disaster planning.

It is important to make sure your plans are linked with the broader state and local government emergency plans, and are developed in tandem with parent organisations (for example, schools and universities) and neighbouring library and cultural institutions, especially where several tenants share the same space.

Loss or damage to the library's collection of contemporary fiction and reference titles may be inconvenient and expensive in terms of replacement, but special consideration should be given to unique, irreplaceable, heritage or historical collections, including documents, ephemera, photographs and so on.

Once you have produced your disaster plan, make sure it is updated regularly and at least on an annual basis. Store copies in several places, including one off-site.



## 2. FORWARD PLANNING

- Carry out a risk assessment
- Prioritise risks and create a schedule of preventative measures
- Stockpile emergency supplies
- Create detailed floor plans
- Build a local support network
- Keep a list of key suppliers – plumber, electrician, builder, equipment hire, recovery companies
- Include disaster response in staff training and induction

### 2.1 Disaster planning in context

Libraries usually sit within a wider organisation and disaster planning must be done with respect to the emergency response and business continuity plans of the parent body.

#### **Example of disaster planning, response and recovery before, during and after the Victorian bushfires of 2009**

- Emergency Management Act 1986, the basis for ...
- Emergency Management Manual Victoria, the basis for ...
- Municipal Emergency Management Plans, managed by the ...
- Municipal Emergency Planning Committee

When the disaster occurred, this infrastructure enabled

- Municipal Emergency Coordination Centres to be established
- Emergency Relief Centres to be set up in affected communities ...

In the recovery period

- Appointment of Community Development Officers
- Establishment of Community Recovery Committees

Because of the unprecedented scale of the disaster

- The Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority was formed
- The Department of Human Services Bushfire Recovery Service Unit was set up to ensure coordination across the regional areas

## 2.2 Risk assessment

There are many types of disasters which could affect libraries. They can be grouped under general headings:

- **Natural disasters** – bushfire, flood, earthquake, high winds, cyclones, tsunami, storms, severe drought, pandemic, plague of insects
- **Accidents and technical failures** – water/sewage leak, accident during construction work, equipment failures, power outages, fire
- **Vandalism, criminal and malicious damage** – violent attack, bomb threat, theft, sabotage, arson

You can't be prepared for everything, and each disaster will play out differently, but advance planning gives you some element of control.

Risk assessment involves:

- Looking at what has happened before – staff, especially longstanding employees and volunteers are one of the best sources of information
- Taking note of local environmental features – rivers, forests, weather systems
- Identifying other potential dangers, for example a chemical plant in the vicinity
- Asking your plumber, electrician, maintenance engineer to look around and identify any possible problem areas, for example asbestos in the fabric of the building
- Seeking advice from the fire service about potential hazards and from the police department about security and easy points of entry
- Talking to your insurance broker

## 2.3 Prioritise and develop a schedule of preventative action

By assessing the most likely risks and prioritising them, you can work out a schedule of preventative action to reduce the likelihood or the severity of a disaster occurring.

Preventative action could include:

- Regular building maintenance, especially the roof and guttering
- Cutting down trees around the perimeter of the building, burning off and clearing vegetation
- In flood-prone areas, making sure items are raised above floor level
- Ensuring items are not directly below fire sprinklers
- Wider spaces between racks to reduce the spread of fire
- Regular monitoring of entrances, exits and evacuation points to make sure they are kept clear
- Carrying out regular mobile library vehicle checks



## 2.4 Emergency supplies

Create an emergency kit that is on hand in case of need. It should be stored in an easily accessible spot and contain:

- **Basic tool kit** – screwdrivers, hammer, spanners, pliers, screws, nails
- **Stationery** - parcel labels, self-adhesive labels, paper, pens, pencils, scissors, clear tape
- **Cleaning equipment** – buckets, bin liners, dust masks, disposable protection suits, disposable gloves, mop, cloths, kitchen paper, towels, safety goggles, sponges, broom, dustpan and brush
- **Storage and protection** – plastic crates, polythene sheets, archive boxes, portable tables and trolleys
- **Survival kit** – bottled water, energy bars, first aid kit, whistles, radio, disposable cameras, torches, spare batteries, candles, matches, mobile phone
- **Community resources** – sanitary towels, baby formula milk, feeding bottle and teats, nappies, toothbrushes, toothpaste
- **Essential information** – disaster plan, emergency contact list, floor plans

In flood-prone areas, a pile of sandbags should be stored, ready for use to hold off approaching floodwater.

## 2.5 Detailed site and floor plans

Create a set of floor plans which show the location of:

- Entrances, exits, main evacuation points
- Mains water tap, gas and electrical cut-off switches, control points for air-conditioning, sprinkler system
- Power points, fire extinguishers, emergency supplies
- Valuable items and documents – ideally these should be kept together in a location that lends itself to quick retrieval

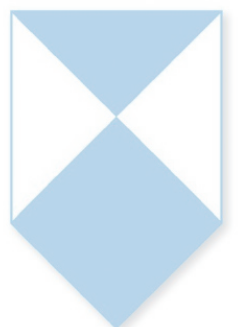
Give copies of the site and floor plans to your local emergency services and support network.

## 2.6 Disaster team

Define who the key people are, what their roles will be, and record details of how they can be contacted during and after opening hours.

Include disaster response as a staff training and induction agenda item.

Ensure that lists are always up-to-date.



## **2.7 Build a local support network**

Look at the potential for establishing an alliance with neighbouring cultural institutions and meet to discuss emergency plans.

It could be possible to agree contra-arrangements for setting up emergency HQs in each other's buildings; creating a jointly-owned set of emergency supplies; providing temporary storage facilities (check your insurance policy); sharing the cost of a staff training workshop.

It may also be useful to make a joint approach to the emergency services, providing information about each institution and also about the agreement to share resources.

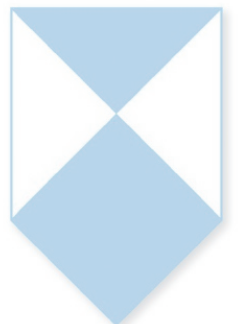
## **2.8 What if?**

Having identified the biggest risks, create outline plans for dealing with the most likely scenarios.

Explore digitisation as a way of preserving the content of unique collections.

## **2.9 Insurance**

Talk to your insurance agent about your disaster plan and make sure you understand your level of cover. For example, if you move valuable items from your collection for safe-keeping, will they still be insured?



## 3. RESPONSE WHEN THE LIBRARY IS AFFECTED

### 3.1 Closest fit

Use the most appropriate 'What if?' plan as the basis for responding to an emergency that is happening in and around your library.

It is important to note that fire, police and ambulance, not library employees, are the frontline emergency responders.

### 3.2 Assess the situation

It is important to keep a clear head and to think before acting.

Immediate considerations should be:

- The safety of people on the premises
- How to limit damage to the building and contents
- Recording the situation – use a camera
- Stabilising the environment
- Saving as many items in the collection as possible
- The potential for resuming normal activities

As soon as you have clarity about the situation, activate your communication chain – calling a designated member of staff who will advise everyone who needs to be informed about the event, freeing you to deal with matters on the ground.

Someone should record all the decisions made by the response team – who, what, when – for reference after the event.

### 3.3 Emergency evacuation

Emergency evacuation plans should be posted around the library. If the situation demands full evacuation of the building, sound the alarm or make an announcement. Staff should be trained to follow the emergency procedures and assist library users off the premises to a designated secure area.

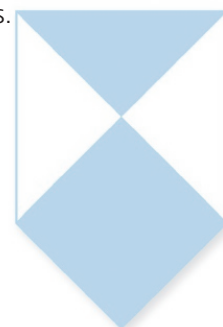
### 3.4 Third party assistance

If appropriate, alert the emergency services or call an expert. When they confirm it is safe to re-enter the building, you can stabilise the situation. If there is no danger to human life, the next priority is containment and damage limitation, which means controlling the source of the problem, either through your own staff and volunteers, or with the assistance of third parties.

### 3.5 Set up a control centre

Organise a space with office equipment, phones and a secure area for coordinating salvage.

Identify what can be done and create a schedule of tasks and timetable for staff and volunteers.





## 4. RESPONSE WHEN THE LIBRARY IS UNAFFECTED

If your library escapes serious damage and is one of the buildings left standing in a devastated area (as happened with public libraries during the 2009 Victorian bushfires), it can provide a safe haven and valuable community resource for people caught up in the disaster.

### 4.1 Role of libraries

In the bushfire affected areas, public libraries opened from early morning until late at night.

People were in shock and it was important that everyone felt safe, rested, nourished and well-informed.

Public libraries provided:

- Temporary accommodation and office facilities for the emergency services
- A community lounge, a resting place away from danger
- A meeting area for families, neighbours and friends
- A place where experiences could be shared
- Entertainment for young children, with toys, books and DVDs
- Distraction for adults, by way of magazines, light reading, escapist fiction
- Computers for people to get in touch with worried relatives and to begin the process of contacting insurance companies, banks, employers, etc
- Welcoming staff, happy to sit and listen to stories, read books with the children or make a cup of tea

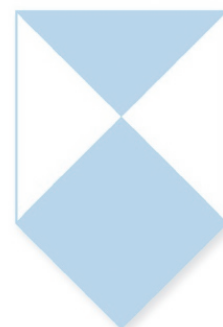
### 4.2 Useful supplies

- Blankets for comfort and warmth
- Refreshments, especially hot drinks, cordial, fruit and biscuits
- DVD player and screen
- Current magazines

### 4.3 Amnesty

Despite the scale of a calamity, people often focus on small things which may, in the scheme of things, seem insignificant to those who haven't been directly affected. After the 2009 bushfires, many library users were concerned about not being able to return borrowed items, as their homes and contents had been destroyed.

The public libraries in the bushfire affected areas kept a record of lost stock for insurance purposes, but reassured library users that this was not something they should be worried about. They were also encouraged to continue borrowing books without having to produce a library card.



#### 4.4 Skills

Library staff were welcome recruits at the relief centres, where their organisational skills were highly valued, especially when it came to sorting through the donated items and arranging distribution.

Staff may be overwhelmed by the quasi-counselling role they might find themselves providing to the community and help should be made available to them to deal with this.



## 5. RECOVERY WHEN THE LIBRARY IS AFFECTED

The first 48 hours are generally regarded as the immediate emergency response period. After this comes the recovery phase, with four elements – social, built, economic and natural.

### 5.1 Stabilising the environment

Only re-enter the premises once the emergency services have declared the building safe.

Assess the damage and take immediate steps to stabilise the environment, for example:

- Open doors and windows (unless security is an issue)
- Remove all standing water
- Remove wet carpets, drapes and furniture
- Set up dehumidifiers and fans, if appropriate

### 5.2 Requirements

Identify what will be needed to contain the damage and begin the restoration process:

- Volunteers, conservation experts, library professionals, trades people, specialist recovery businesses
- Equipment and materials
- Off-site secure area for storage of undamaged items
- Counselling support for staff

### 5.3 Disposal

Check with your insurance company before beginning the task of separating what can be salvaged and what has been damaged beyond repair. They may well send out an assessor, in which case the process may have to be delayed until they have gone over the site.

If your insurance company is happy for you to proceed, take photographs as evidence of the scale of the losses.

Allocate a disposal area and organise a mechanism to avoid unnecessary double-handling – for example, hire a skip so rubbish can be dumped straight into it.

### 5.4 Recording and evaluating

In addition to a photographic record, keep detailed notes of the damage to the property, collection, IT, documents, etc. At some point in the first few weeks, you may well need to put a value on the items destroyed for insurance purposes.

### 5.5 Cleaning

Once the fabric of the building has been secured, including windows and doors, the process of cleaning can begin. Work from the top down, allocating library staff to the task of restoring items from the collection, for example drying out books, and non-specialist volunteers to more general cleaning duties.

## 6. RECOVERY WHEN THE LIBRARY IS UNAFFECTED

The people affected by a natural disaster may not be used to needing help, and assistance must be provided in a way that is sensitive to their requirements. This section is based on the experiences of the library staff in the areas affected by the 2009 Victorian bushfires.

### 6.1 Social recovery, health and well-being

People appreciate somewhere to go to escape from the realities of a difficult situation. In a library there is the opportunity to look at beautiful pictures of far flung places.

It is a chance to spend some time in comfortable surroundings – particularly important when people are living in temporary or makeshift accommodation.

Library staff are familiar faces, part of the community they serve, and they are well-placed to offer understanding, support and assistance to those who have lost their homes.

However, involvement in a disaster, whether directly or indirectly through contact with the victims, is a traumatic experience. Many library users died in the Victorian bushfires and when the mobile library teams returned, they found themselves at the centre of grief-stricken communities. It helped library management teams to have advice from psychologists who are experts in this area.

### 6.2 Resuming normal activities

Staff, volunteers and users may well be dealing with their own emergency situations. There may not be access for mobile libraries. There are many reasons why it can take several weeks before the library is ready to resume normal activities.

In the meantime, it is important to inform the community about what services are available; opening times; special events and in particular any special support for families affected by the disaster.

When the library service is fully operational, it provides the opportunity for a modest celebration. When the mobile library service returned to St Andrews after the bushfires, for example, the team staged a party for children in the community centre garden, with storytelling, singing, dancing and craft. It was seen to be part of the healing process.

### 6.3 Communication hub

Yarra Plenty Regional Library Service set up a wiki immediately after the bushfires to provide community information and links to other resources.

Libraries help to bring communities back together again. Even though many people sought refuge outside the bushfire affected areas, some have returned to participate in baby rhyme time as a way of keeping in touch with the community to which they have every intention of returning.

### 6.4 Managing donations

In the aftermath of a major disaster, the wider community will want to do something to help. Gifts and donations are a first thought, but when vast quantities of items were delivered to the relief centres after the Victorian bushfires a series of generous acts swiftly turned into a logistical nightmare.

Libraries are likely to receive donations of second-hand books. In small quantities, these can be made available to the people who have lost books in the disaster. In larger quantities, they create a storage and distribution problem.

There is also a quality issue. While people who have lost their homes may welcome second-hand books in good condition or new books, some of those donated will be well-thumbed cast-offs.

Dissuade people from donating books until you have a clear idea of what might be needed. After the bushfires, people were looking for cookery and gardening books; dictionaries, atlases and other reference titles; self-help manuals; favourite authors, including J K Rowling and Agatha Christie.

There may also be cash donations and these must be ring-fenced in the library budget, with a separate line on the accounts showing where they sit, in readiness for the rebuilding process.

### **6.5 Rescuing possessions**

If precious books, photographs and other items are damaged in the disaster, the library may well be asked by users for advice about repairing folios; renewing bindings, or restoring pictures.

Fact sheets can be downloaded from a variety of sources (see section 8) and handed out.



## 7. REBUILDING

### 7.1 Renewal

If the library or other public buildings, such as schools, have been damaged in the disaster, their repair, reconstruction and reopening will be an important and very visible part of the community's renewal.

### 7.2 Preserving keepsakes and memories

After the Canberra bushfires of 2003, the Australian War Memorial ran clinics with curators and trained staff, for people to bring in their damaged artefacts, especially medals and receive professional advice and assistance to have them restored. This service was also provided by the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material after the Victorian bushfires.

Although libraries in the bushfire affected areas of Victoria deliberately avoided putting up pictures of the devastation on their walls, they have provided space for displays of photographs and pictures of the area as it was before the fire.

### 7.3 Rebuilding with Books

In the immediate aftermath of the Victorian bushfires, people were focused on the necessities of life – food, clothing, shelter. It is only now, six months later, that people are returning to a form of normality and looking for books, CDs, DVDs.

With so many books donated and further pledges of fundraising, ALIA has formed a partnership with the Australian Booksellers Association, supported by the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority, Public Libraries Victoria Network, the State Library of Victoria, the School Library Association of Victoria, the Australian Publishers Association and Friends of Libraries Australia, to launch the Rebuilding with Books campaign.

The campaign is designed to help people build their personal book collections, with a choice of brand new and very good quality second-hand books, plus book vouchers. It involves an instore promotion for booksellers, asking their customers to purchase a book voucher for the cause, and fundraising activities in libraries around the country.

More information is available on the ALIA website [www.alia.org.au/disasterrecovery](http://www.alia.org.au/disasterrecovery).

### 7.4 Learning from the experience

It is important to record and share experiences of emergency response and recovery with others in the library world. This can be achieved through ALIA – [enquiry@alia.org.au](mailto:enquiry@alia.org.au).



## 8. USEFUL RESOURCES

### **ALIA Disaster Recovery Project: Jane's Story**

A case study of the experience of Yarra Plenty Regional Library Service after the Victorian bushfires of February 2009

[www.alia.org.au/disasterrecovery](http://www.alia.org.au/disasterrecovery)

### **ALIA Disaster Planning for Libraries**

The companion document to these guidelines

[www.alia.org.au/disasterrecovery](http://www.alia.org.au/disasterrecovery)

### **Australian Government**

Disaster Assist and Health Emergency – latest news, information and advice; Emergency Management in Australia *Preparing for the Unexpected*

[www.disasterassist.gov.au](http://www.disasterassist.gov.au), [www.healthemergency.gov.au](http://www.healthemergency.gov.au), [www.ema.gov.au](http://www.ema.gov.au)

### **Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials**

Advice for consumers about salvaging possessions after a disaster

[www.aiccm.org.au](http://www.aiccm.org.au)

### **Australian War Memorial**

*Caring for your Mementoes: Cleaning Soot Damaged Objects, Caring for Books* and other useful factsheets

[www.awm.org.au](http://www.awm.org.au)

### **Blue Shield Australia**

The Australian branch of the international organisation concerned with protecting cultural heritage in the event of disasters

[www.blueshieldaustralia.org.au](http://www.blueshieldaustralia.org.au)

### **Collections Australia Network**

*Be Prepared: Guidelines for Small Museums for Writing a Disaster Preparedness Plan*

Appendix 3: Emergency Response Procedures and Appendix 4: Salvage Procedures

[http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector\\_info\\_item/2](http://www.collectionsaustralia.net/sector_info_item/2)

### **DISACT**

Example of a partnership between cultural institutions for the protection of public collections in the ACT region – sample Memorandum of Understanding for collaborative working

[www.anbg.gov.au/disact/](http://www.anbg.gov.au/disact/)

### **Emergency Management Australia**

Attorney-General's department, also includes Natural Disaster Relieve and Recovery Arrangements by state and information about business continuity

[www.ema.gov.au](http://www.ema.gov.au)

**Heritage Preservation: The National Institute for Conservation**

Resources for professionals and members of the public

[www.heritagepreservation.org](http://www.heritagepreservation.org) (US)

**MayDay**

Annual campaign to raise awareness of the issue of disaster preparedness among libraries, museums, galleries, archives and other cultural heritage sites

[www.blueshieldaustralia.org.au](http://www.blueshieldaustralia.org.au)

**National Archives of Australia**

Central repository for government records

[www.naa.gov.au](http://www.naa.gov.au)

**National Library of Australia**

Support for libraries

[www.nla.gov.au](http://www.nla.gov.au)

**Red Cross**

Emergency planning for the public *Emergencies – Prepare, Respond, Recover*

[www.redcross.org.au](http://www.redcross.org.au)

**Salvation Army**

Centres for donations and supplies, humanitarian aid

<http://salvos.org.au/>

**ScreenSound Australia**

Advice about caring for audio-visual items

<http://www.nfsa.gov.au/preservation/>

