

Planning for Disasters

It's a Disaster Waiting to Happen

It is scary when you think about it. Natural and man-made disasters happen all of the time and without warning. We cannot avoid disasters, but we can take steps to keep the effects of a disaster to a minimum. This is one situation where a little planning can go a long way.

Planning for the Inevitable

This is a records management bulletin, so naturally we are concerned with protecting records from damage caused by a disaster. Fortunately, there are a number of simple steps that you can take to reduce the risk of damage to your department's records. The key is to plan in advance.

Disaster Planning

Every government department should have an emergency plan that is part of the Government's Emergency Response Plan: http://www.maca.gov.nt.ca/safety/emergency_organization.html. One of the areas covered by this plan is business continuity planning. A business continuity plan makes sure that vital business operations can be delivered even during a crisis. Identifying and protecting vital records is an important part of a business continuity plan. Many vital operations cannot continue to operate without records.

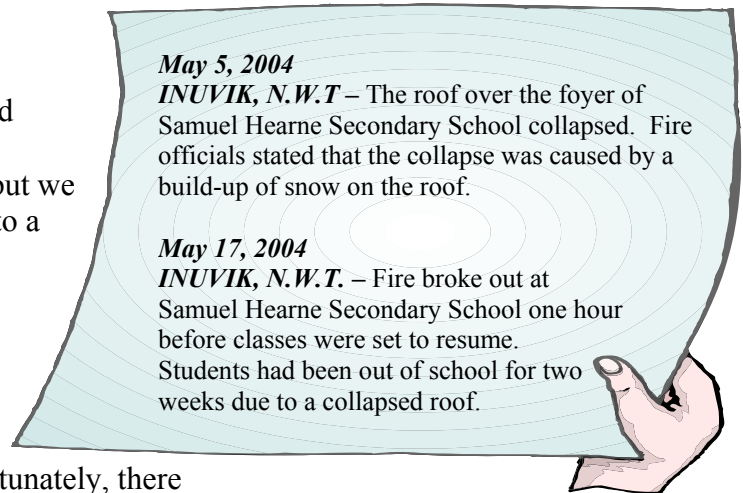
Vital Records

Vital Records are records that are needed in the event of an emergency and to keep vital business operations running during the emergency. A second class of vital records includes records that are needed to re-establish operations after an emergency. Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada has a useful guide to vital records: http://www.ocipep.gc.ca/info_pro/self_help_ad/general/book_thepres_e.asp.

Protecting Records from Water Damage

Water damage is the most common threat to hard copy records in an office. There are many easy ways to protect records from water damage:

- Store files, photographs, videotapes, and other media in closed filing equipment. Close the equipment when no one is in the office. Burst pipes and sprinkler systems can damage records that are left uncovered on desks and tables.



- Keep records off the floor. Put boxes on pallets. Water from flooding, burst pipes, and sprinkler systems will run across the floor and damage anything in its path.
- Store records on ground floors and upper floors. Records stored in basements will receive the worst damage.

Protecting Records from Fire

The most effective method of protecting vital records from fire is to store them in closed, fire rated, filing equipment. There are several options, including filing cabinets, vaults, fire-resistant rooms, and fire-resistant buildings. Your preferred option will depend on the type and volume of records.



Protecting Records from Other People

Sabotage and theft has always been a concern. It is difficult to protect against disgruntled employees because they have access to buildings and computer equipment.

Vital paper records should be stored duplicated and stored in another location.

Electronic records are protected by a system of passwords and backups. Do not give out passwords, and change them regularly. Turn off or lock your computer when you are away from your desk so that no one else can use it. When employees leave, make sure that their accounts are cancelled or transferred to someone else.

Hackers, viruses, worms, and other outside threats are an increasing risk to the government. While the government's firewall protects us from many of these outside threats, there are steps that you can take to reduce the risk of an attack. Follow the government Internet guidelines and do not use your computer for non-government purposes:

<http://www.gov.nt.ca/FMBS/documents/dox/internet-email.pdf>

Recovering Damaged Records

Water and smoke damaged records can be recovered if you work quickly. Wet documents should be removed within 48 hours. Otherwise, they will stick together, ink will bleed, and mould and bacteria will begin to grow.



Documents and files that are slightly damp can be air-dried.

Wet documents and files should be tightly packed in new boxes that are lined with butcher paper or a plastic bag. Separate the files with butcher paper or waxed paper. Freeze the boxes at between -15 and -30 degrees Celsius until they can be freeze-dried or vacuum dried.

Water damaged photographs, film, magnetic media, and compact disks should be rinsed in a container of cold water and stored in cool clean water until they can be worked on. Store microfilm in clean water until a microfilm recovery company is able to process it. Gently

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separate photographic film, prints, or negatives and rinse in clean water. Hang on a line to dry. Prints may be dried flat on drying racks. Make sure that they do not overlap.

Documents that have received mild smoke or mould damage can be cleaned. Small volumes can be cleaned with a dry chemical sponge. Large volumes should be sent to a document recovery company for processing.

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