



# Emergency Management for Cultural Heritage Institutions

## *Introduction*

Emergency management is a term that describes the effort to reduce vulnerability to hazards and respond to and recover from disasters. Effective emergency management requires collaboration and flexibility. It is a cyclical process; every response to an emergency will inform the preparedness for the next. Engaging with emergency management is the best thing that cultural heritage organizations can do to prevent major damage and loss caused by disasters. At the very least, familiarity with vocabulary of emergency management will help collection stewards to effectively communicate with first responders and recovery organizations like FEMA.

## *Terminology*

**All-hazards approach:** An approach for prevention, protection, preparedness, response, and recovery that addresses a full range of threats and hazards, including domestic terrorist attacks, natural and manmade disasters, accidental disruptions, and other emergencies.

**Chain of command:** The orderly line of authority within the ranks of the incident management team.

**Damage assessment:** The process of identifying and documenting the extent of physical damage that a natural or man-made disaster has caused to buildings and/or property.

**Disaster:** An event that results in significant damage or loss. An emergency can become a disaster if action isn't taken immediately to protect staff, visitors, and the collection.

**Emergency:** A serious, unexpected, and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action.

**Emergency management/response personnel:** Includes Federal, State, territorial, tribal, sub-state regional, and local governments, private-sector organizations, critical infrastructure owners and operators, nongovernmental organizations, and all other organizations and individuals who assume an emergency management role. Also known as emergency responders.

**Emergency Operations Center (EOC):** The physical location at which the coordination of information and resources to support incident management (on-scene operations) activities normally takes place. An EOC may be a temporary facility or may be located in a more central or permanently established facility, perhaps at a higher level of organization within a jurisdiction. EOCs may be organized by major functional disciplines (e.g., fire, law enforcement, and medical services), by jurisdiction (e.g., Federal, State, regional, tribal, city, and county), or some combination thereof.

**Emergency preparedness and response plan:** the document that identifies hazards specific to an organization and dictates staff responsibilities and procedures for mitigating the effects of, preparing for, and responding to damage caused by those hazards.

**Emergency Support Function (ESF):** A functional area of response activity established to facilitate the delivery of federal assistance required during the immediate response phase of a disaster to save lives, protect property and public health, and maintain public safety. The ESF at the federal level that most affects cultural heritage organizations is ESF #11 Protection of Natural and Cultural Resources and Historic Properties.

**Hazard:** A natural, technological, or social phenomenon that poses a threat to human health and safety or the safety of the infrastructure or collection.

**Hazardous materials (HAZMAT):** Any material that is explosive, flammable, poisonous, corrosive, reactive, or radioactive (or any combination) and requires special care in handling because of the hazards posed to public health, safety, and/or the environment.

**Incident Command System (ICS):** A standardized on-scene emergency management concept specifically designed to allow its users to adopt an integrated organizational structure equal to the complexity and demands of single or multiple incidents, without hindrance by jurisdictional boundaries.

**Mutual aid or Assistance agreement:** Written or oral agreement between and among agencies/organizations and/or jurisdictions that provides a mechanism to quickly obtain emergency assistance in the form of personnel, equipment, materials, and other associated services. The primary objective is to facilitate rapid, short-term deployment of emergency support prior to, during, and/or after an incident.

**Risk:** The possibility of suffering harm from a hazard.

**Risk assessment:** The process of identifying the likelihood and consequences of an event to provide the basis for informed decisions on a course of action.

**Salvage:** The act of saving artifacts at risk of being completely destroyed by a hazard.

**Stabilization:** Treatment procedures intended to maintain the integrity of cultural property and to minimize deterioration.

**Tabletop exercise:** An activity in which key personnel assigned emergency management roles and responsibilities are gathered in a nonthreatening environment to discuss various simulated emergency situations.

**Threat:** Natural or manmade occurrence, individual, entity, or action that has or indicates the potential to harm life, information, operations, the environment, and/or property.

**Triage:** An organized process that matches needs with available resources according to a priority scheme designed to achieve the end objective (i.e. goal) of the specific triage system.

**Vulnerability:** The susceptibility to damage or injury from hazards.

## *Emergency Management Cycle*

The emergency management cycle illustrates the ongoing process by which all organizations should plan for and reduce the impact of disasters, react during and immediately following a disaster, and take steps to recover after a disaster has occurred. As a cyclical process, it is never complete. Recovery, even from the smallest incidents, can inform prevention and mitigation.



**Mitigation:** Those activities designed to alleviate the effects of a major disaster or emergency.

- *Examples:* Keeping collections stored 4"-6" off the floor on risers and/or shelves; using earthquake straps to secure collections stored on shelves.

**Preparedness:** Activities, programs, and systems that exist prior to an emergency and that are used to support and enhance response to an emergency or disaster. This phase implies that risks, hazards and vulnerabilities have been assessed.

- *Examples:* Having an updated emergency preparedness and response plan in place; having supplies and salvage equipment, like plastic sheeting and absorbent pads, stocked and placed near collections storage; installing water sensors in areas that have had issues with leaks.

**Response:** Activities and programs designed to address the immediate and short-term effects of the onset of an emergency or disaster such as artifacts salvage and relocation within 48 – 72 hours.

- *Examples:* Draping shelves in plastic sheeting during a water emergency; placing objects affected by mold in polyethylene bags to prevent cross-contamination.

**Recovery:** Long-term activities and programs beyond the initial crisis period of an emergency or disaster designed to return all systems to normal status or to reconstitute these systems to a new, less vulnerable condition. Upon completion of the post-emergency critique, it is possible to update plans and implement corrective actions.

- *Examples:* Reopening and returning to pre-event operations; arranging for the conservation treatment of damaged objects; making repairs to the building or mechanical systems.

## *Web Resources and Key Readings*

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