

Response and Recovery

Records protect the rights of both the government and its citizens. Governments need documentation of decisions, regulations, precedents and lines of succession and authority. Individuals need proof of identity, medical histories and documentation of assets. Communities need historical records to retain a sense of continuity with the past on which to build a future. These are the records that need to be protected now and ensure that they can be accessed in the future.

Once a disaster has occurred, the next steps are Response and Recovery.

Response

Response is the immediate and short-term actions taken during and after an emergency or disaster to assess and address needs, including protection of health, safety and property, including records

Once an emergency/disaster has been identified, the emergency coordinator should implement the disaster response plan and assemble the response team. Once it is safe to re-enter the facility, the following steps should be taken:

- Conduct initial collections damage assessment to identify immediate needs—removal, freezing, etc.
- Conduct initial facility damage assessment/ health and safety issues assessment to identify immediate actions and who to call for assistance—stabilizing environment, dehumidification, mold abatement, renovation, etc.
- Contact outside sources of assistance

Response time for records can be critical—the window to begin assessment can be as little as 72 hours after the disaster, before the records deteriorate beyond recovery. The faster the response, the better chance of salvaging essential records.

Remember, the focus of response is to address those records that have been identified as essential. While it might be nice to recover all records, the cost in time and resources may make that impractical.

Recovery

The Recovery phase involves the actions necessary to bring things back to normal to the extent possible, including full damage assessment, insurance claims, salvage and stabilization of records, and the resumption of business operations.

Recovery may be a long-term phase—depending on the degree of damage to the records and/or the facility. Some of the steps may include:

- Complete full facility and equipment damage/condition assessment and address repair/replacement needs—walls, carpeting, furniture, etc.
- File insurance claims.
- Resume critical operations at a pre-established location
- Salvage and stabilization of records:
- Address immediate collections needs, e.g. freezing wet records.
- Address longer-term conservation needs.
- Return treated collection materials to storage and availability

The focus of recovery is to return the facility to a safe, operation condition and to return the essential records back to the collection.

Response Best Practices Checklist

- Contact the emergency coordinator and implement the disaster response plan
- Assemble the response team
- Conduct initial collections damage assessment to identify immediate needs for the records
- Conduct initial facility damage assessment/health and safety issues assessment to identify immediate actions and who to call for assistance

Recovery Best Practices Checklist

- Complete full facility and equipment damage/condition assessment and address repair/replacement needs
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Resources

CoSA offers detailed self-directed online courses in Essential Records and Records Emergency Planning and Response at:

- <https://www.statearchivists.org/programs/emergency-preparedness/essential-records-er-course/>
- <https://www.statearchivists.org/programs/emergency-preparedness/records-emergency-planning-and-response-repr/>

CoSA also provides links to other emergency preparedness resources at

- <https://www.statearchivists.org/programs/emergency-preparedness/emergency-preparedness-resources/>

About CoSA

The Council of State Archivists (CoSA) is a nonprofit membership organization of the state and territorial government archives in the fifty states, five territories, and District of Columbia. Through collaborative research, education, and advocacy, CoSA provides leadership that strengthens and supports state and territorial archives in their work to preserve and provide access to government records. CoSA facilitates networking, information sharing, and project collaboration among its member organizations to help state and territorial government archives with their responsibilities for protecting the rights and historical documents of the American people. Read more at www.statearchivists.org.

About Polygon Group

Polygon is a disaster recovery company that provides emergency response and restoration services for damaged archives. Polygon specializes in water and mold damage restoration, archival cleanings and pest eradication. www.polygongroup.com

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