

CONSERVE THEM ALL MY DAYS

by Karl G. Schmude*

The prospect of disaster visiting a library — most often in the form of fire or flood — is no longer felt to be remote as reports of calamities have become increasingly common.

A recent example was a fire at the Los Angeles Public Library, which destroyed 400,000 books. A further 700,000 of the 2.1 million collection were damaged by water.

For Australian librarians, however, the most telling sign of the vulnerability of their collections was probably the near-disastrous fire at the National Library in March 1985. This event highlighted the urgent need for libraries to make comprehensive arrangements for disaster control, in particular the preparation of a contingency plan.

Such a plan covers three main areas:

- *Prevention*, which involves inspecting the library building in detail with a view to reducing the possibility of accidents. Special circumstances which deserve attention include the protection of material in transit or during periods of building alteration.
- *Response*, which embraces such activities as a program of educating library staff and the creation of a list of available supplies and facilities in the event of an emergency. (Last year the State Library of NSW initiated the compilation of such a list to cover various institutions, reflecting the desirability of co-operative support when required.) This part of the written plan also enumerates the first steps to be taken in coping with a disaster, so that spontaneous actions will be avoided that may later prove to have been counter-productive.
- *Recovery*, which relates to the processes of salvage and restoration, addressing such issues as the appropriate treatment of damaged materials and the re-establishment of library services.

The details of a disaster plan will finally correspond to the features and needs of an indi-

vidual library, but each plan is likely to contain the following kinds of information (as the guidelines drawn up by the Illinois Co-operative Conservation Program in America suggest):

1. A list of telephone numbers (home as well as office) of (a) library administrators, (b) members of the library's Disaster Group (who share responsibility for immediate response to a disaster and later salvage operations), (c) appropriate maintenance and security personnel, and (d) fire and police departments, relevant advisory groups (such as a conservation centre), and regional facilities (eg firms with freezing plants).
2. A detailed building plan, specifying the location of such features as electrical boxes, air-control systems (heating, ventilating, etc), and fire extinguishers. This plan, together with the entire Disaster Plan, should be brought to the attention of the local fire brigade, accompanied by an explanation of the special vulnerability of library materials.
3. A list of emergency equipment and supplies, such as fans, plastic milk crates and unprinted newsprint.
4. Availability of commercial freezing and cold storage facilities for holding damaged materials until salvage arrangements are made.
5. A list of procedures to follow at the time of an emergency, covering the handling of priority collections and of different types of library materials. There should also be a statement of things *not* to do, such as attempting to separate wet pages or heating water-soaked books to dry them.
6. A list of potential volunteers to help in the event of a disaster.

A final word on library disasters may be left to the organisers of the Illinois Program:

'We will do all we can to assist you.
We can do *more* if you are prepared!' — (*Illinois Libraries*, Vol.67, October 1985, pp.719-723.)

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An article about the NSW State Library Disaster Plan is on page one of this issue of *InCite*.

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LOCAL STUDIES SECTION

Local Studies Librarians North Shore (Sydney) Group is initiating an application to form a Local Studies Section of the LAA. The submission must be supported by 100 signatures of professional and/or library technician members of the LAA who are resident in a majority of States and/or Territories.

As a matter of urgency, if you are interested in becoming part of this application, please contact Margaret Wyatt at Kuring-gai Municipal Library, 265 Pacific Hwy, Lindfield 2070 to obtain the relevant documentation. It is hoped to present the application to the LAA Council meeting in November 1986.

In addition the group welcomes any contribution which analyses the nature of local studies librarianship and/or the advantages of forming a Local Studies Section. The group particularly welcomes the involvement of librarians and libraries outside the Sydney region.

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Compiled by David J. Jones

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Call for Nominations for Division Officers for 1987

Special Libraries Section Victorian Group: Nominations are called for President; Vice-President; Secretary; Treasurer; and Committee Members (7). Nominations are to be sent to Janet Kelly, 39 Newry Street, North Fitzroy, 3068, by 30 October 1986. (Please use nomination forms distributed with *InCite*.)

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