

# RESPOND: Actions to take **during** a disaster

The library's first priority in a disaster is always human life. From the moment a disaster strikes to the time that it is resolved, libraries are thinking about how to keep patrons, staff and volunteers safe. While programming and service delivery may be secondary, libraries have also found creative ways to support their communities even as disasters unfold. The following response steps have been identified by preparedness experts and NLS libraries who have first-hand disaster experience:



## Implement your disaster response plan

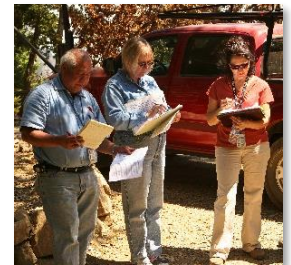
Disasters may occur suddenly and without warning. Regular drills and practice before a disaster strikes will help staff and volunteers to implement the plan even in worst-case scenarios. As a disaster unfolds, put library-wide and branch specific emergency action plans (EAPs) into action:

- If someone is injured or an emergency originates in the library, immediately call 911
- Determine whether it is appropriate to evacuate, shelter in place or lockdown library facilities
- Remind staff and volunteers of their roles and responsibilities during a disaster
- Always act in a way that prioritizes safety and human life – *books and materials can be replaced, lives cannot*
- If evacuation is warranted, do not return to library facilities until approval has been given from city or county officials



## Coordinate continuity of library operations

- Immediately convene the library's emergency coordinator, disaster response team and senior staff when safe to do so
- Review and discuss how the disaster response plan will be implemented
- Coordinate with city or county emergency officials
- Revisit roles and responsibilities for staff and volunteers
- Identify immediate actions items
- Determine how services and programming should be adjusted during the disaster



## Secure critical documents and collections

Depending on the disaster, it may be some time before staff and volunteers can safely access library facilities.

- If feasible, secure emergency contacts, vital records and log-in information for the library's online accounts before evacuating
- Determine whether it is appropriate to move technology, special collections or other library materials to a safer location
- Do not move or attempt to clean materials that have already been damaged
  - Damage from smoke, ash or water should be addressed by a qualified salvage expert



**When there is a disaster, libraries are a natural place for people to turn...**During the last power shut off, we ended up with more people in the library than the recovery centers. – *NLS Library Director*





## Implement the library's communications plan

- Reach out to city or county leadership; coordinate with communication staff, such as public information officers (PIOs)
- Determine how the library will communicate with staff, volunteers, patrons and the broader public – including who will approve messages before they are sent out
- Share and promote accurate information using the library's website, newsletters and social media accounts, as well as through partner groups
- Provide updates about changes to library services



## Provide services during a disaster

The duration and severity of a disaster, safety concerns, staff capacity and community needs should all be considered when determining how to provide services during a disaster. If conditions permit, programs may be offered at alternate locations or moved online. The following are a few ways that NLS libraries have provided services during recent disasters:

- Provide internet access through branch WiFi services and WiFi hotspots, if possible
- Offer virtual storytimes via Instagram, Facebook or YouTube
- Deliver library programming where people are:
  - Hold storytimes and programs at unaffected library branches or other locations, such as community centers, agency offices or disaster recovery centers
  - Deploy the bookmobile to support displaced residents
  - Provide books and "activity boxes" to organizations supporting disaster response efforts
- Promote resources and services via the library's website, including:
  - E-library services (ebooks, audiobooks, magazines, etc.)
  - Education and e-learning tools, such as online homework help
  - Resources for families, businesses and those affected by a disaster



When you worry, try doing something to keep yourself busy,



## Support broader disaster response efforts

Library staff may also be asked to support city or countywide emergency operations if they are considered "essential employees" or if a disaster is prolonged

- Coordinate with city or county officials to clarify what is expected of library staff during a disaster
- Promote volunteer opportunities, without pressuring anyone to participate; remember that staff and volunteers may also be affected by a disaster
- Ensure that staff are assigned appropriately; roles and responsibilities should reflect staff members' personal capacities and ability levels
- Provide frequent check ins and mental health supports to those working during a disaster



## Prepare for the recovery phase

- As a disaster abates, engage staff, volunteers and partners in transitioning to recovery
- Revisit the library's recovery plans and make changes, as needed, based on community needs

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