



# Adequate Records Management in Perspective - Disaster Management

## How do disasters relate to records?

It is essential for state government agencies and local government authorities to plan and protect records and records systems from risk and to allow for the continuation of business during a disaster event<sup>1</sup>.

A disaster is defined as any event that creates an inability on an organisation's part to provide critical business functions for some predetermined period of time<sup>2</sup>. Disasters affecting records may include:

- Natural events such as earthquakes, cyclones, bushfires, floods, vermin
- Structural or building failure such as malfunctioning sprinklers, heating or air conditioning systems, leaks in roof, poor wiring
- Industrial accidents such as nuclear or chemical spills
- Technological disasters such as viruses and computer equipment failures
- Criminal behaviours such as theft, arson, espionage, vandalism, riots, terrorism and war and
- Accidental loss through human error.

Disasters may also be caused by storage conditions that are unsuitable for the media stored, and by the natural decay of materials<sup>3</sup>.

By ensuring that it takes all adequate steps to prevent a disaster, and by developing and maintaining a Disaster Plan, an agency will satisfy key elements of Outcome 7 of the *Adequate Records Management - Meeting the Standard*.

## What is disaster management?

Disaster management consists of four main stages:

- Prevention
- Preparation
- Response and
- recovery

<sup>1</sup> State Records Authority of New South Wales, *Standard on Counter Disaster Strategies for Records and Recordkeeping Systems*, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> *Disaster Recovery Journal - Disaster Recovery Glossary*, <http://www.drj.com/glossary/glossleft.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> State Records Authority of New South Wales, *Guidelines on Counter Disaster Strategies for Records and Recordkeeping Systems*, 2002.

For official records and records systems, these four main stages can be implemented by:

- Assessing risks affecting records and records system, initiating subsequent activities to reduce the probability of a disaster and reducing the probability of loss should a disaster occur
- Developing a disaster response plan to assist the agency to respond to an emergency or disaster event
- Identifying and protecting vital records of the agency
- Planning and initiating resources to protect or secure the agency from loss and resorting records and operations, so that normal business operations can resume.

## **What should be included in a disaster response plan?**

As a minimum, a disaster response plan should include:

- List of vital records, their location and control documentation
- List of equipment and material available for use in disaster salvage and recovery
- The function, composition and chain of command of the salvage and recovery team and their contact details
- Procedures for the identification and declaration of a disaster situation and initiation of the disaster response chain of command
- Provision for the training and current awareness of the salvage and recovery team
- List of sources of back up resources, including expertise, trades people, materials, equipment, vehicles and accommodation
- Procedures for updating and testing the plan
- Simple technical information on the handling of damaged material, directed towards establishing priorities for early action.

In addition the plan should contain specific procedures for staff to follow from the time a disaster is discovered until the preparation of the final report.

## **How should a disaster response plan be implemented?**

Implementation of the disaster response plan involves:

- employee training to prevent unsafe practices or carelessness
- regular building and equipment inspections and maintenance to avoid building and equipment malfunctions
- installation of fire, water and movement alarms
- establishment of an information security program to protect information, and
- Establishment of prevention, response and recovery contracts so that vendors can be on hand in an emergency.

For the plan to be implemented successfully, agencies also need to:

- assign responsibility for the implementation and ongoing maintenance of the plan
- involve staff in the process of implementing the plan

- place a priority on vital records and critical data recovery, and
- regularly practice and test the plan through training exercises<sup>4</sup>.

### **Further information**

- State Records of South Australia, *Adequate Records Management - Meeting the Standard* (2002).
- Standards Australia, Australian Standard AS ISO 15489-2002, *Records Management* (2002).
- Australian/New Zealand Standard AS 4360—1999, *Risk Management* (1999).
- State Records Authority of New South Wales, *Standard and Guidelines on Counter Disaster Strategies for Records and Recordkeeping Systems* (2002).
- National Archives of Australia, *Disaster Preparedness Manual* (2000).
- Artlab Australia can provide advice concerning disaster prevention and the development of Disaster Plans.

Visit our website <http://www.archives.sa.gov.au>

---

<sup>4</sup> State Records Authority of New South Wales, *Guidelines on Counter Disaster Strategies for Records and Recordkeeping Systems*, op cit.