



## **Emergency Preparedness Planning for Library Collections: Development of a Program and Lessons Learned**

**Lynn Brodie**  
Director General  
Information and Document Resource Services  
Library of Parliament  
Ottawa, Canada

### **Meeting:**

**200 — Empowering staff through preservation training! How your library and users will reap the benefits — Preservation and Conservation with Education and Training**

### **Abstract:**

*The Library of Parliament in Ottawa (LOP), Canada has a rich history of serving the federal Parliament's library and information needs for over 140 years. Significant changes brought about by renovations, staff movement and the increasing recognition of the importance of preserving the documentary heritage of Parliament led us to develop an emergency preparedness program to ensure that our staff is empowered to meet the challenge. This paper will focus on our efforts to update the existing emergency preparedness plan for LOP collections; to engage emergency response team members and library collections maintenance staff to buy into the emergency response plan by including them in its development; to provide training on emergency response procedures (including scenario exercises) and salvage techniques; to provide guidance for keeping the plan up to date and performing regular scenario exercises at staff meetings, and to evaluate and measure knowledge gained.*

*The goal is to provide an evaluation of the impact that the development of a program for emergency preparedness including training had on staff and to highlight lessons learned as a result.*



## Background

The Library of Parliament is the library, information and research service for the federal legislature of Canada. Its services are primarily provided to the 410 parliamentarians of the Senate and the House of Commons as well as to their staff and senior officials. The Library has approximately 355 employees located in six buildings and houses roughly 17 linear kilometres of print collections. The collections, in print and electronic formats, are focused on politics, government, history, social affairs, and the law and legislation of Canada. The official publications of a number of countries with similar systems of governance also constitute important historical collections. There are numerous unique and valuable documents dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> through to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and preservation copies of Canadian parliamentary publications, which are treated as “special collections.” These are kept in a secure area with limited access and more stringent environmental conditions. The bulk of the collections are housed in an 1876 heritage building designed in the High Victorian Gothic Revival style by architects Thomas Fuller and Chilion Jones. The building is located in **Parliament’s Centre Block** in proximity to both chambers, as stipulated in legislation. The Library is circular in shape with galleries and alcoves facing into a reading room area. It has often been referred to as the most beautiful room in Canada, given the richly and fantastically carved white pine. From the tiny detail of each finely crafted flower to the soaring height of the dome, the Library of Parliament is a joyous celebration of colour, texture and function. The collections are shelved on three gallery levels and two below-ground floors filled with compact shelving.

The second most important location for collections is an off-site storage where less frequently consulted publications are housed in mobile shelving alongside a bindery and conservation lab. For the convenience of parliamentarians and library staff, several smaller collections of books are housed in other heritage buildings. This scattering of documentation has presented the Library with the challenge of ensuring that staff at each location is prepared to deal with emergencies involving the collections. This paper will focus on the Library's process for updating its emergency preparedness with the engagement of staff.

### **Emergency preparedness for library collections**

The Library of Parliament is no stranger to emergencies. In the 136 years since the current building opened on Parliament Hill, it has survived the major fire of 1916, which destroyed the Centre Block building it was connected to, and a fire in the dome of the building in 1952. The latter caused significant water, mildew and mould damage to over 150,000 books. The building was restored and renovated between 1952 and 1956, with major work done to fireproof the wood and finish the two underground collection storage floors. No significant work was carried out either inside or outside from 1956 until 2002, though many small projects attempted to bring the working environment into today's modern electronic age with its extensive requirements for electrical and communications connections. In 1991, a relatively small rare books room was created on the second basement level to protect these books from fire and water, as well as from misuse. The concept of preparing for or managing disasters led to the drafting of a disaster management plan in 1988. It was a very detailed plan which involved several teams of staff being responsible for specific functions however only the team leaders were really aware of a plan. Communication about it was very limited. In the 1990's a more straightforward approach was taken with one manager and her staff maintaining a detailed list of activities and procedures. Collections maintenance staff working for this manager was broadly aware that a plan existed and did participate in a salvage workshop given by an experienced person at our National Library. Over the years, we created a disaster preparedness cabinet for the main library but gave little thought to the other locations. Once or twice, staff was shown what was in the cabinet (boots, buckets, tarpaulins, plastic sheeting, blotting paper, pencils, flashlights, disposable camera, personal protective equipment, etc) and given some idea about the use of the items in the event of an emergency. They were called upon to use the contents on several occasions when rain poured in through loose windows, when the plumbing leaked, and when the chilled-water ventilation system broke down and flooded the lowest level. However, most staff and senior management had no idea what to do when these events occurred and could not, in one case, even locate the disaster preparedness cabinet!

Several events conspired to force us to rethink our approach to preparing for a collections emergency. The principal one was a major conservation, rehabilitation and upgrade of the main library building. This involved all collections staff and most of our reference staff in one way or another, since they all had to relocate and needed to identify the books that they required be nearby for their work. All collections were inventoried, cleaned and checked for mould, and extensive conservation efforts were undertaken. Second, the transfer of all collections from the main building to another heritage building and off-site swing space meant that we had to be prepared for emergencies in several new locations. We were incredibly fortunate during the five years that we were out of the main building that we did not have to

deal with any events. Third, we made some effort to update the disaster management plan with the assistance of a consultant but while the draft version was full of excellent information, it was too detailed and lengthy to be of practical use. It would not be inaccurate to say that a certain complacency had also set in, given that we were now located in “newly rebuilt” locations and emergency preparedness was not a priority. And finally, the arrival of new managers responsible for security and business continuity planning as well as knowledge preservation and collection maintenance gave fresh impetus to updating our emergency planning as it related to our document collections. Our business continuity plan, sometimes referred to as a business resumption plan, contains guidelines and information to provide for the continued availability of essential services and key assets of the Library of Parliament in the event of a disruption to its operations. An updated version of that plan required a component dealing with the collections. As a result, some policy information was extracted from the lengthy draft of our disaster management plan and included. For the purposes of collection maintenance, however, and from the viewpoint of conservation staff and managers, this was very unsatisfactory as it included little practical information or direction on how to deal with an emergency involving print documents.

### **Moving forward with a program**

Sonia Bebbington, Director of Knowledge Management and Preservation, determined that we needed a program to deal with emergencies, not just documents and tools in a cart. Any documentation had to be useable by staff, accessible, easy to navigate and understand, and focused only on the information required to deal with an emergency. We also needed to provide training and make sure employees knew how to deal with an emergency; we wanted to build their confidence and knowledge. It was important to find a way to maintain that knowledge and know-how over time, as well. After consulting with colleagues in other organizations in Ottawa, we decided to hire the Canadian Conservation Institute, which is also Ottawa-based, to assist us with the development of this program.

The structure of the program consists of documents, implementation activities and other miscellaneous but critical elements.

The three key documents are a plan, a policy and a response guide. The plan provides an overview of the program, including detailed accountabilities, processes and review mechanisms. The policy, which is generally extracted from the plan, is focused on specific accountabilities, roles and responsibilities, and aligns emergency response for collections with the Library’s overall business continuity plan. Lastly, the response guide provides practical information: what to do and how to do it. The audience for each of these three documents is different. The plan is essential for managers responsible for the stewardship of the Library’s collections. The policy provides senior managers across the organization and staff in general with a broad overview of who does what in order to get us back in business after an emergency. And the response guide is for those who carry out the practical work with the collections and in the collection spaces. This final document has the plainest language, and it brings in elements which are very specific to the Library of Parliament: it includes our evacuation plan, our floor plans, our contacts, etc. The instructions included do cover different stages of emergency response, but the emphasis is really on the initial steps.

The implementation activities include a communication plan, ongoing training, measurement and review. We realized that we needed to sensitize management as well as staff in all service areas about this program, and we specifically needed to engage collections staff by keeping them informed and obtaining their input. Ongoing training of those who carry out the practical work with the collections will increase their knowledge, provide us with important feedback and ensure a level of confidence with respect to decision-making in the event of an emergency.

Through this training, we believe that we are engaging staff at each location to take responsibility for being prepared. As for measurement and review, we wanted to make sure that we had the tools necessary to evaluate our actions during and following an emergency in order to improve our response or outcome. The primary desired outcome for a busy specialty library with heavily consulted collections is to return all needed documents to client use as quickly as possible. The secondary outcome is to restore/conservate all unique and valuable documents for the benefit of future clients and researchers. In other words, there are short-term and long-term goals for our emergency preparedness program. We had another goal this year, which was to evaluate staff knowledge of emergency preparedness, prior to implementing this program and again several months later. I will provide more detail on this shortly.

The miscellaneous elements are critical components of the program that support the key documents and implementation activities. The two that we have identified so far are emergency supply carts and relationships with external providers. The emergency supply carts/cabinets/bins include equipment and tools that will enable staff to respond in the short term to small and medium-sized emergencies. Tarpaulins, plastic sheeting, packing supplies, cleaning supplies, flashlights, gloves, boots, pails and so on may be included. One of the ideas that came out of our training session this year was to make sure that each location with collections should have an emergency supply kit – regardless of the value or ease of replacing these collections – and locations with staff, but no collections, should have an emergency supply kit. What's more, the unit responsible for accommodation should have a transportable emergency bin. Since the majority of the Library's staff work in an office building with collections on only one or two floors, we had never before considered having an emergency kit in the office building. Yet we have experienced floods in offices and have had to deal with wet and dirty documents and furniture. A transportable emergency bin would have been very practical.

If an emergency is large-scale, affecting most of an entire building or city, it calls for the participation of external organizations. We decided that this program should build some relationships now, ensuring that we knew in advance the appropriate contacts, both formal and informal. We asked an external provider specialized in responding to library disasters to visit our site and to get to know our needs. We also gathered relevant contracting information beforehand rather than waiting to determine this during an emergency, in the event that we should ever need to call on the external provider's services. We are not committed to using their services but we are now more knowledgeable and will be able to make a decision should we need to.

As previously noted, our emergency preparedness program is wide-reaching. I would now like to focus on our experience with building staff engagement to strengthen our response to emergencies relating to collections.

## Staff engagement

We had a goal to train and engage staff to deal with emergencies affecting our various collection storage areas, and this goal was supported by our plan and policy. We contracted the Canadian Conservation Institute to assist us with the training, given their experience and practical approach using table-top exercises. In simple terms, these exercises consist of hypothetical situations including relevant details that a team can discuss around a table and determine the most appropriate responses to the emergency. We began by identifying the appropriate staff to participate in the training and information session as well as a second hands-on salvage training session. We explained to the staff the goal and why they were included, and provided a draft of the response guide. We made it clear that the training was an opportunity for them to suggest changes and improvements to the response guide. We also included a short questionnaire to gauge their current knowledge and find out what their response would be in the event of an emergency, with the intent of repeating the questionnaire several months after the training. The questionnaire featured 10 questions, including open-ended questions, those with yes or no answers, and Likert scale questions (for example, how confident would you feel . . .). The responses confirmed that the training was essential since few knew how to respond or where to find information or tools, and they were not certain of their role.

A training session and a workshop were given in February. The first, a full-day session, was attended by collections maintenance staff, bindery and conservation staff, reference staff from several locations and staff responsible for accommodations and security. The key components were emergency response objectives and emergency scenario exercises. The second event, a half-day workshop, included only collections maintenance, bindery and conservation staff since it covered salvage training.

Ten emergency response objectives must be met in order for a response to be fully effective. The objectives are meant to be few in number and easier to remember than the lists of tasks in the complete plan. Since the objectives are designed to guide the preparation of response actions, they are not specific to any one emergency event. Staff can scale their response in each case to deal with the situation they face. They can determine that objectives will vary in terms of priority, but each has to be addressed. It is their responsibility to work together to make sure this occurs.

### **Emergency Response Objectives**

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|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. <i>Coordinate the responders</i> | 6. <i>Restore the building</i>          |
| 2. <i>Secure the site</i>           | 7. <i>Obtain supplies and equipment</i> |
| 3. <i>Protect people</i>            | 8. <i>Inform your publics</i>           |
| 4. <i>Limit the damage</i>          | 9. <i>Document the incident</i>         |
| 5. <i>Save the collection</i>       | 10. <i>Pay for it all</i>               |

Staff feedback was encouraged during the workshop and session. For example, we created “damage report” forms to guide the assessment of an emergency. Simple questions such as what type of damage was done, how many shelves were involved, which collection area was affected, what was the condition of the immediate area, etc. made the assessment seem more manageable to staff. Staff understood that we were promoting their personal safety and that of their colleagues over all else. They identified such issues as access to the emergency supply carts in several locations, the need for secure space to move collections out of harm’s way, and the importance of communicating with other staff in the building who are not dealing directly with the emergency, but whose work is affected. They also came up with manual procedures that could be put in place if everyday electronic tools were unavailable.

To familiarize staff with these objectives, we used them in emergency response scenario exercises. Each team worked on a hypothetical emergency situation specific to a building with which they were familiar. Floor plans showing where the emergency took place helped staff to visualize the impact, and think very specifically about what would be affected and what resources would be needed to respond. Staff were given tools to help them plan their response to the specific emergency, including cards with the 10 objectives, a planning chart that asked for specific information on each action (see Table 1), a flow chart that outlines key salvage decisions (see Figure 1) and the draft emergency response guide.

**Table 1 – Key Salvage Decisions**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>	<b>Supplies / equipment needed</b>	<b>Space needed</b>	<b>People / expertise required</b>	<b>Notes</b>

Source: **Canadian Conservation Institute**

Each team was given an hour to prepare a list of key actions that were required for the response. They then shared these with the entire group. During the exercise, each team also received a couple of wild cards – unanticipated developments and other factors that may or may not impact team responses. Many wild cards complicate a response, but others can be beneficial. For example, if a flood occurs mid-winter and the temperature outdoors is –30°C, can you pack wet books and store them securely outside to buy time?

The salvage training included techniques for handling and moving items, air-drying collections, removing soot and freezing items. The emphasis was on enabling staff to use the materials in the emergency carts more effectively; for example, identifying the use of the different types of paper in the cart, for example freezer paper for interleaving items with sticky surfaces, blotter paper for drying and paper for packing

books for freeze-drying. Their use might be obvious to a conservator but not to a person without training.

In the two-month period after the workshop and session, the staff was invited to review the contents of the emergency response cart at their location. This raised additional ideas and suggestions for improving the usefulness and accessibility of the materials. For example, staff realized that they would need scissors to get into the cart but scissors were not to be found on that floor. We have since obtained tear-away cart closures that save time and effort.

A second questionnaire was distributed to participating staff two months after the inventory review of emergency response carts. The answers show a marked improvement among staff in terms of where to find the emergency response carts, the level of knowledge of the carts' contents and how to use them in an emergency, and the level of confidence in knowing what to do if faced with a collection emergency. In open-ended responses, staff acknowledged the importance of personal safety. We were very pleased with their retention of training information and plan to continue involving staff in the annual cart inventory updates. Scenario exercises are an excellent activity to bring to staff meetings at least once a year and a good team-building opportunity, too.



Library of Parliament emergency supply cart



## Lessons learned

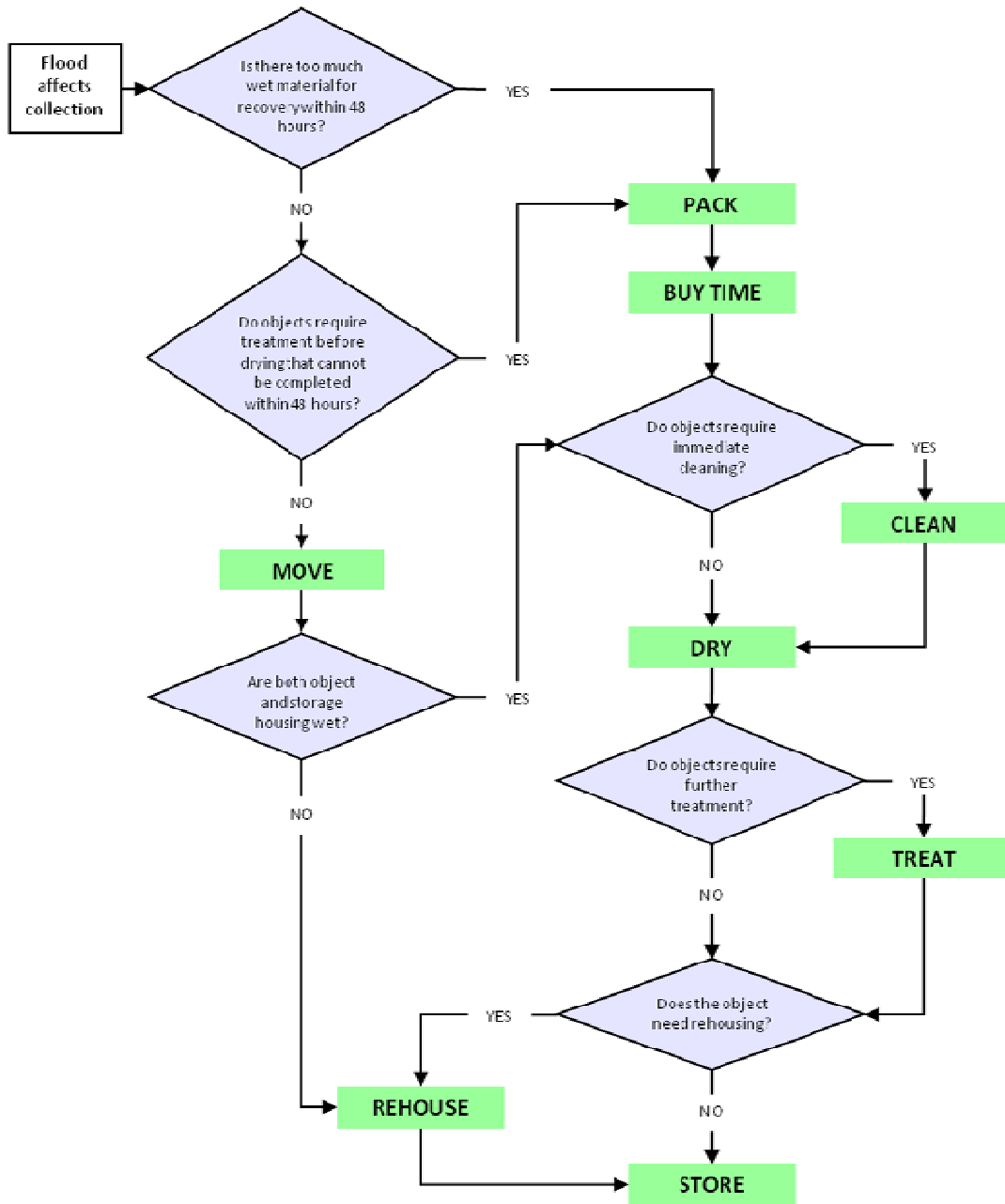
The staff brought an amazing level of detail to the training and contributed ideas for protecting collections. They suggested ways to improve the emergency response guide and make it theirs. In fact, CCI usually delivers a generic training session on emergency response to organizations operating without a current response plan. The partnership with us was the first time they had delivered training based on a draft response guide – it was therefore an excellent way to engage staff in becoming familiar with, by contributing to, and by taking ownership of the key tool they would be using. The staff directly involved in collections maintenance are rarely called upon to make decisions as they generally rank much lower in the Library's hierarchy (below the professional researchers, librarians, lawyers, etc.). The format used in the workshop and session gave collections maintenance staff the opportunity to practice making decisions under potentially difficult conditions and recognized their detailed knowledge of their surroundings and of the collections. We will need to follow up with staff to keep them engaged and give them opportunities to practice making decisions in emergency situations. The response guide needs to be tailored to the Library of Parliament and its locations. The emergency response scenarios have to be based on the spaces we occupy so that staff can recognise potential for mitigating problems prior to an emergency. An example of this is when we realized that the emergency supply cart was located on a lower level and in the scenario (an actual wild card event) the elevator broke down so any supplies needed had to be brought up five flights of stairs to deal with a leaking roof-staff came up with ways to mitigate this. They also pointed out that if rain came in through a large curtain wall which extends to the basement, the elevator was very likely to be affected since it is right next to this glass wall. We realized that disasters have an emotional impact and our staff have a strong sense of responsibility for the collections with which they work. We will include updated response guides in English and French in each of the emergency response carts so that staff can easily locate copies. However, we need to issue a communiqué that provides links to the online versions of the documentation and emergency contact lists for each location. We do not own the buildings we work in or store our collections in – the Department of Public Works and Government Services does. So it is extremely important to cultivate a relationship with the Public Works departmental liaison to ensure responsiveness. Last but not least, it is important to communicate to senior management about the emergency response program for collections. Having senior management support and acknowledge that this is an important activity will ensure that their staff participate and are prepared.

While it is time consuming to develop and implement an emergency preparedness program for collections *that engages staff in the process*, the Library of Parliament found that staff brought many valuable improvements to the program and demonstrated increased commitment.

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Lynn Brodie, Director General, Information and Document Resource Service, Library of Parliament  
Canada (lynn.brodie@parl.gc.ca)

Figure 1 – Salvage Flow chart



Source: Canadian Conservation Institute