

Disaster planning and risk management

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This guidance focuses on the prevention and mitigation of events likely to cause sudden and significant loss or damage to archives.

A disaster which threatens the archives themselves may well also pose a threat to the safety of staff and service users. For this aspect, archives should consult [official fire safety guidance](#) or the relevant contacts in their parent institution.

Additional information can be found on the [Health and Safety Executive](#) and [Department of Community and Local Government](#) websites.

The [Business Recovery Plans standard](#) on the records management pages also contains relevant detailed guidance, including a specimen plan.

Who should be involved

Detailed work may be assigned to an individual or small working group, including a trained conservator (where available), but:

- Preventing or responding to a disaster may have significant resource implications, and some level of involvement at senior management level is vital
- Disaster planning will be more effective if it links to wider policies and processes within the parent organisation
- All staff members will need at least basic awareness of what is being done
- Where archival institutions share premises or sites with their parent body or other organisations, these should as far as possible be involved in the planning process

Analysing risk

The best way to deal with potential disasters is to stop them happening. A first step is to identify and assess sources of potential risk in terms of the probability of an incident occurring, and likely impact if it does, including the costs of recovery.

Formal risk management methodologies are commonly employed in many organisations, and archival institutions may therefore be able to use that employed by their parent body.

For more information, see [HM Treasury's Orange Book for risk management](#). The relevant section of the [OGC Business Continuity Planning Guide](#) though not specifically aimed at archives is also a good starting point for this process.

Risk assessments should be reviewed at least annually to take account of changed circumstances.

In addition, it is important to be aware of temporary increases in risk, for example, due to the presence of contractors on-site, extreme weather conditions, unusual activity in adjacent premises.

Common sources of risks include:

Flood

- extreme weather/tidal conditions
- leaking/damaged roofs
- blocked drains and gutters
- malfunctioning air conditioning or other equipment
- plumbing problems
- firefighting

Fire

- smoking
- poor storage of inflammable materials
- malfunctioning electrical wiring/equipment
- lightning
- 'hot work' by contractors
- arson/vandalism (up to half of all UK fires are started deliberately)

Explosion

- terrorism
- gas leaks
- industrial accidents in nearby premises

The process should include a detailed inspection of the premises and operational activities on site, and consultation with staff in each work area, particularly those such as caretakers or cleaners who have day to day responsibility for the building. It will also be necessary to consult specialist external sources of advice such as:

- fire Prevention Officer
- crime Prevention Officer
- insurance provider
- relevant facilities providers and contractors
- a qualified conservator (if not available in-house)
- systematic logging of previous incidents will also help to refine risk assessments

And there are published sources of information for the assessment of certain types of risk:

Information on areas liable to flooding can be obtained from the [Environment Agency](#). Contact details for firms offering more detailed flood risk assessments can be obtained from the [National Flood Forum](#).

Information on fire risks can be obtained via the [official fire safety guidance](#), the [Arson Prevention Bureau](#) and relevant sections of the [Fire Safety Toolbox](#).

Useful links for terrorism risks and wider civil disasters can be found on the [londonprepared](#) and [UK Resilience](#) web-sites.