

# *For the Record*

Maryland's Records Management Newsletter

Brought to you by the Maryland State Archives & DGS Records Management Division

## Earthquakes, Hurricanes and Flooding! Oh My!

Recent events have highlighted the array of risks that can face us as Maryland citizens. In such situations, we are all concerned for the safety of the individuals and property entrusted to our care. As government officials, we must also remember our responsibility to the government records in our keeping. Minimizing the damage to records during disasters preserves information integral to recovery efforts and is vital to the continuation of government services.

While neither the Maryland State Archives nor the Records Management Division has the resources to handle extensive salvage efforts, we are available with training, advice and assistance. We are currently participating in the Intergovernmental Preparedness for Essential Records (IPER) project, a training program for government agencies developed by the Council of State Archivists. Full descriptions and registration for the two-part course are available on the Maryland Emergency Management Agency calendar at <http://www.mema.state.md.us/calendar/index.asp>. Further information on IPER is also available at [http://www.msa.md.gov/msa/intromsa/html/record\\_mgmt/cosa.html](http://www.msa.md.gov/msa/intromsa/html/record_mgmt/cosa.html).

While a disaster preparedness plan requires detailed provisions tailored to an agency's specific circumstances, the following general tips can be a handy starting point.

Make a Plan – Planning on how to handle a disaster should happen well before a disaster is in the forecast.

- The goal of a plan is to protect records and prevent information loss.
- Plans should account for any type of disaster, both natural and man-made.
- The plan should be official: It should be in writing, approved by the agency head, and accessible to employees.
- The plan should clearly assign responsibility and delegate authority.
- There should be a clear chain of command and a system for disseminating information.
- The plan should have provisions for assessing damage, mobilizing a response, maintaining communication, and documenting recovery efforts.

Knowledge is Power – The following information is vital to disaster planning and recovery:

- Know what records you have and where they are located.
- Assess the vulnerability of your records. Which are most integral to continuation of operations? Which are backed up in other formats or other locations?
- Have contact information for the vendors and suppliers that deal with disaster recovery.

Disaster Preparation – If you have warning of a pending disaster, you can take further preparatory steps.

- Take precautionary steps to protect records. For example, if flooding is possible, move records from the floor.
- Make sure your disaster recovery plan is up-to-date and that employees have accessible copies.

Recovery – The quicker you can start the recovery process, the better.

- Take action as soon as possible. If you can't immediately reach the records, start gathering supplies and making arrangements.
- If records are wet, freeze them if possible to avoid mold. Keep them frozen until they can be spread and air-dried or given to a recovery vendor. If you can't freeze them, try to keep them cool and under bright lights.
- Be sure to keep track of where your records are during the recovery process.
- Remember health concerns while doing recovery efforts. People are always more important than records!

Questions, suggestions, or concerns?

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