WORKING WITH EMERGENCY RESPONDERS
TIPS FOR CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS
What do they need to know before, during, and after an emergency?
Fire

• No institution is immune from fire.

• Flood damage can be dried out and restored, stolen property has a chance of being recovered; damage from fire is usually permanent and irreparable.

• Fire is more cunning and less discriminating than a thief.

• It can spread through very small areas quickly.

• Cavalier attitude “fire won’t happen to me”.

• Blind faith in local fire department to save them and their property.
Planning

• Without a plan to deal with the threat of fire, you place the buildings, occupants, visitors and collections at risk.

• Complexity of these plans may vary from simple to more complex.

• The first few minutes in a fire incident is critical.

• Planning, training, and automatic fire protection systems are key ingredients to protection.

• Should have an emergency self-protection plan that spells out how to report a fire and safely evacuate the premises.
Life Safety

• Life must always be priority number one.

• Instruct employees on how to turn in an alarm:
  • Make sure they know what the building fire alarm sounds like.
  • Ensure employees can hear the alarm.
  • Ensure all employees know their primary and secondary exit routes.
  • Exit doors are accessible, unlocked and not blocked.
  • Exit signs are operating and visible.
  • Emergency lights are functional and adequate.
  • Ensure the staff knows where the meeting point is outside the building.
• Most important factor in preventing a fire loss is maintenance.

• The fire protection policy needs to be in writing and updated periodically.

• Management and staff responsibilities need to be defined and fire prevention procedures established.

• This program needs to be based on a high standard.
Expectations of Fire Department

• Understand fire departments seldom respond to your types of property.

• How fast can they get to your location?

• What is the ISO rating of your fire department?

• Has the fire department pre-planned your facility?

• Have you shared your emergency plan?

• Does the fire department know what is valuable?

• Have you collectively discussed what is needed to protect your valuables?

• Does the fire department need special equipment or additional personnel to best protect your valuables?
Safeguarding Ignition Sources

• Much can be done to minimize chance of a fire starting or spreading with little, or no expenditure of monies.

• Your elementary school training taught you that it takes fuel, air and heat for a fire to occur.

• You can’t do much about air, but you can control both the fuel and ignition sources in your facilities.

• Leading causes of fire include heating devices, cooking, electrical wiring, appliances and smoking.
Reducing the Likelihood of Fire

• Welding, cutting and burning.

• Fuel fired portable heaters should be prohibited.

• Electrical appliances should be restricted and kept away from combustibles.

• Heating, air conditioning and other mechanical equipment should be installed by professionals in compliance with codes.

• Electrical wiring should be installed in strict accordance with code.

• Consider installing arc-fault circuit interrupters on your electrical circuits.

• Lightning protection should be checked by an expert to ensure that it is adequate, in good repair and properly grounded.
Safeguarding Fuel Sources

• Safe containers should be used for collecting waste papers, oily rags, and other refuse including packing materials.

• Store important papers or collections in fire resistive safes.

• Hallways, stairways and access aisles must be kept clear of all storage.

• Storage should be prohibited in mechanical equipment rooms, electrical closets and within 3 feet of the front of electrical panels.

• Exhibits, interior/exterior modifications, should be constructed of fire safe materials to reduce the fire risk. Use fire retardant material.

• Treat combustible materials with a fire retardant chemical or paint reduce the chance of ignition.
Passive Fire Protection Measures

• Proper disaster planning should consider all active fire systems failing.

• Consider how you can further incorporate vertical and horizontal barriers to resist fire spread. Maintain their integrity.

• Fire doors protect opening in fire walls and should not be propped open, that they positively latch and they close without assistance.

• Make sure penetrations for duct work, electrical wiring and plumbing in fire-rated walls, floors and ceilings are sealed.

• Placement of collections into enclosed cabinets and containers is a form of compartmentation that is highly desirable.
Fire Detection Systems

• Historical buildings often present unique fire detection and suppression issues.

• What is the purpose of the fire detection system?
  • Strictly life safety (local alarm)
  • Sound an alarm and summon trained personnel

• Heat detectors – slow to react due to the need for heat buildup.

• Smoke detectors – best early detection of fire; placement is key

• Photoelectric detectors – provide special coverage; not for every facility.
Fire Suppression Systems

• Portable fire extinguishers
  • Requires human reaction and risks

• Fire sprinkler systems
  • Wet, dry and pre-action systems
  • Not just building protection but designed for life safety
  • Proven reliability
  • Reduce water damage resulting from fire fighting operations

• Gaseous fire suppression systems
  • Clean agent
  • Need enclosed area
  • Limited amount of agent
  • Require regular maintenance
  • Do not protect the building structure
Summary:

• Evaluating your facility needs is very important.

• Developing an emergency plan, training employees and working with the local fire department is key to prevention and actions in case of an emergency situation.

• Identifying valuables and how to protect them should be a part of every emergency plan. Simply thinking someone will remove items from the facility may not be feasible or warranted.
That's all Folks!