

Discussion:

[The transcript is edited and paraphrased for clarity and brevity.]

Alison Wain, Australian War Memorial. Has anyone ever used a priority salvage list in a disaster situation? It seems to me that you're either still locked out of the building in which case you can't salvage anything or you've just gone back in to a situation that's probably a large scale disaster where you end up working your way in from the doorway. Alternately you confront flooded areas which determine your first responses. It seems that priority lists might be useful in the prioritisation of recovery efforts once salvage has occurred but are they actually useful in the salvage response phase?

Bernard Kertesz, seminar chair. There seems to be a couple of ways to look at priority listings; there's the "most valuable" list which you use to prioritise selective evacuation of collection material when you have time and no immediate danger and then there's the listing you might need in a salvage situation. This might be a completely different kind of list based on a risk assessment of the contents of a particular space against the potential disaster scenario. A given space and the collections within might present a different salvage problem if the disaster is a fire or a flood. The vulnerabilities of the collections might determine the salvage priority. These vulnerable materials may not be on the "most valuable" list however and might not be high priorities in a collections evacuation scenario. The crown jewels might be evacuated in advance of an impending disaster however the salvage after a flood might focus on the parchment or other critically vulnerable objects. Priority lists are a difficult issue; it really depends on what you wish to use it for.

Alison Wain, Australian War Memorial. I think that's a really good point cause we've been discussing priority lists here as you know and people have tended to say "Have you done priority lists?" they haven't said "Have you done priority lists for valuations? Have you done priority lists for immediate salvage? For material vulnerabilities?" That's perhaps a bit of a new way to go.

Kim Morris, Art & Archival Pty Ltd. I'd like to address a question to Matthew if possible, thanks for your talk very enlightening. As someone who's always advocated emergency services visits to cultural institutions to familiarise yourself with the kinds of materials we hold and the kind of business we conduct with regards to what might happen once you take over control of a building that's been evacuated, if we were to invite you along to come and have a look at things, how would you go about it?

Matthew Harper, ACT Emergency Services Authority. There's two ways to answer that, the political way and the reality way. From the political viewpoint, who pays? At the moment our funding agreement for the provision of fire emergency services to Commonwealth buildings only extends to response. It doesn't reflect training, specifically pointing out that training and staff development, from either side is on a fee-for-service basis. However, a couple of things we can do; we can't take every fireman through, that's a given, but institutions could provide a venue for our more or less, three monthly briefing of district officers on current risks, current trends and current issues.

They also try to do a visit to learn something so, if we could do that in one of your spaces and then spend an hour with someone, to have a look at stuff and get an appreciation of what's in your institutions. Fire officers come and do the normal fire inspection on a day to day basis but it's getting that higher level of the Emergency Services to have a greater appreciation that's useful, mainly because in an emergency response situation, if they feel that there are communication difficulties they can get someone in who can provide a more complete liaison role. In a situation where the fire response is intensive and resources are fully engaged in the response we may well need to provide someone who can help keep the whole continuity chain on track. The flip side of this is that an institution's business continuity team, emergency management team might be invited to have their monthly/quarterly/annual meeting at our premises and understand what it's like, have a quick tour through our CAD room, look at an ambulance, look at a fire truck. We can put that on for you so that you appreciate the sophistication of our approach to dealing with emergencies. The other things is that we can construct an exercise with you; usually we like to have a go-between, a consultant provider such as Les (Whittet), to organise your side of things to maximise the training benefits and also we do our organising however such an exercise is going to cost. The Precinct 84 exercise cost us about \$25,000, mainly because we need to bring in overtime crews and equipment to not leave a gap in our emergency response capability. Such exercises therefore require 6-8 months of serious planning and are not done on a whim.

Kim Morris, Art & Archival Pty Ltd. A question to Alison Casey. With staff sent in to a disaster site, what are their rights? Say you have a flooded area with some compromised situations, what are the rights of those going in and those sending them in to do recovery work?

Alison Casey, Comcare. I think there's two issues there; firstly you'd need to have a site safety assessment done and someone charged with making the decision because, as an employer, you can't request people do work that you know is unsafe. Employees also have the right to refuse to do work that they believe is unsafe. That's why you need to plan in advance and try and work through some of the potential and foreseeable situations.

Kim Morris, Art & Archival Pty Ltd. So I guess what you're saying is that before we put people into a site they have to know what their role and responsibility might be on the site, the actions they might take so there's an education process that has to occur before a disaster arises. That is, to overcome the health and safety issues.

Alison Casey, Comcare. No workplace is free from hazards, that's impossible. You've got to keep that in mind. That's why you have to ask "What is the risk that this actual hazard is posing?". There'll be some situations where the level of risk would be unacceptable. And as an employer you've got to take all of those steps to ensure the health and safety of your employees. You need to consider your duty of care because it may be one thing to react in the heat of the moment (I have these visions of people rushing in to save Captain Cook's journal or the Arthur Boyd paintings) and make health

and safety a secondary consideration however in the event of a mishap or tragedy you may be liable.

Matthew Harper, ACT Emergency Services Authority. When the fire brigade hands back the site, a legal point where the fire brigade and police will hand back the site after an incident, they hand it back saying that the site is safe from the incident that they attended. If there's been a fire then they're acknowledging that the fire's out; they are not guaranteeing the safety of the building. That's for the building owner to assess. A fireman can leave a building with only two walls standing and acknowledge that the fire is out and you can re-occupy. At that point the legal situation is that it's your site. You have to take over at that point which is why the whole team is there if it's been a big fire, the building owner, the insurer, the investigators, Comcare, WorkCover. These folk can't be kept out indefinitely, only until the site is safe from the incident. Sometimes however the brigade will occupy a site even after an incident is stabilised and salvage may occur while associated issues are dealt with. An example is almost ten years ago when salvage work proceeded during the week long presence of the brigade in the Memorial after a high pressure leakage. The brigade held the site while they resolved the fire safety system issues. The liaison during such a situation is generally with the chief fire warden and if that person has established a high level of credibility with the fire personnel they will do their utmost to facilitate the safe salvage of collections because they have an understanding and appreciation of the building's contents. They may even be amenable to assisting in the removal of critical easily portable items in an emergency; they have been known to return to a burning house to rescue urns of ashes or other critical items causing distress to the owners. Therefore if that first point of contact that the emergency services have, the chief fire warden, the building liaison officer, the art gallery liaison officer creates a cooperative and helpful contact then that attitude will be returned in kind.

Les Whittet, Leslie Whittet & Associates. I'd just like to add that what we're seeing here is the importance of good command and control over the management of an incident. I don't mean emergency services, they've got that down to a fine art, but within your own organisations. That is where the command team has such a critical role. You cannot have groups people, perhaps emotionally charged over the condition of their collections, racing in just as you can't have IT people, who can get just as emotionally charged over their servers, rushing in to rescue their equipment. You've got to keep that control. The other point that I want to make is that when emergency services hand the site over you may have all sorts of concerns requiring structural engineers and so on however don't forget that your first priority will be the security of your building. Emergency services can't provide that for you once they've handed the site back.

Bernard Kertesz, seminar chair. With a lot of situations where you've got responders coming in it's probably good to have someone who's a coordinator for those responders; someone who's responsibility is responder safety. Someone who's job it is to ensure everybody's checked in, they know who's there they control who comes on and off the site in terms of responders; someone who's responsible for ensuring that those people are monitored for stress and to warn them off dangerous situations; someone who monitors what the responders are actually doing. A good example of how important that can be is

the Hurricane Katrina response where huge numbers of people volunteered to assist in New Orleans. The authorities set up very large reception centres, not to discourage responders but to register and control them. They needed to ensure that the people assisting were physically and mentally capable of doing the tasks required and that they were registered for access on and off the site. There was somebody responsible at all times for the coordination of those responders. A team of people just turning up and starting to do things is not satisfactory. Someone needs to be responsible for controlling who's coming in, what they're doing, monitoring progress and ensuring that those people don't end up way out of their depth

Matthew Harper, ACT Emergency Services Authority. If anyone really wants an exercise in the next few years we're getting a heap of money from the Commonwealth for counter terrorism exercises. This years exercise is already organised but if you'd like to be considered for next year's, please feel free to contact me with your ideas.