

COLLECTIONS: ESTABLISHING SALVAGE PRIORITIES

Frequently, disasters within libraries are of such a magnitude that institutions cannot save everything damaged in the collections. Some materials will be lost. Thus far, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has been lucky. UIUC lies within a couple hundred miles of the largest fault line in North America – the New Madrid (or “New Madris” for those that prefer historic spellings) Fault. Its last major quake was in 1812. Due to the low population at the time, few people sustained injuries although church bells rang as far away as Boston, MA. It is believed that the quake was ten times more powerful than the earthquake that destroyed San Francisco in 1906. A repeat performance is anticipated to destroy about 60% of the city of Memphis, TN.

A little more close to home, there were two minor arson-related fires in the Main Library in the 1990’s. Fortunately, they occurred during operating hours and were quickly contained. However, impressions of the damage caused by a major fire can be generated by looking at the 1987 fire at L.A. County Public Library. This fire:

- *Destroyed* \$10,000,000 in collection material (not including the building).
- Resulted in 5000 gallons of water per minute entering the building from fire hoses.
- Required fifty fire companies to bring the fire under control.

Consequently, it is important that collection managers begin thinking about what materials are required for the institution to resume services as soon as possible. This is important because:

- Students’ and scholars’ academic careers will largely depend on how well we manage the response and how quickly we can re-establish services.
- 70% of what is in the typical academic library is not available within seven years of publication.
- We will lose more valuable material if we are unable to target resources at those we most need to save.
- Replacement costs more than recovery.
- In the event of a major water disaster, some pieces will be irretrievably damaged after only six hours of being soaked.

As you think of the collections in your libraries, think about these points. Also, think about what materials you need to re-establish service and rebuild a collection should there be so much damage that everything cannot be saved.

Collection managers should think about materials in their libraries as one would in a triage situation – what materials are levels one, two and three with level one being the highest priority pieces. In terms of individual pieces, this type of triage is generally the following questions:

- Is this item critical to the institution’s operations?
- Can it be replaced?
- Will the cost of replacement be more or less than restoration?
- Is this item available in another format or location?
- Does the item have a low or high priority level for collection development?
- Does the item’s composition require immediate attention?
- Are there items that deserve special attention in light of other considerations?

However, we are interested in classes of materials. If we had to go through your library and only take what we needed to save, what would it be?