A GUIDE TO FILLING OUT THE EMERGENCY PROCEDURES FLIP CHART

This manual has been devised to help you and your staff to fill in the accompanying flip chart. This manual mirrors the flip chart; each page in the flip chart matches a similarly titled piece of text in the manual. By reading this manual with the flip chart at hand, you can, in pencil, fill in the chart as you read along – and mark those areas you might need to "research" a bit before you fill in more blanks. When all the information is compiled, finalize the copy by writing in permanent ink, or just make sure the pencil is legible.

Please note that this is really the exact opposite way recommended for one to proceed; usually nature centers create a committee to study all aspects of disaster response and prevention and then codify the information. This flip chart and manual are to be used by those nature centers that *realistically* realize that there may be no other way to draft any sort of disaster response plan. Even though you will be putting the cart before the horse in this way, you will nevertheless come up with some sort of disaster response vehicle and be a little further down the road.

It is necessary to caution that a filled-in flip chart is not a disaster manual, but rather a guide for immediate response. It is often very difficult to think clearly and correctly in times of stress and disaster. This will be a guide to memory and, if a copy of the manual is put at every phone (you can tailor a response for each area of your nature center, or just fill in multiple copies with the same information for the whole place) all staff members will be equally prepared and have action steps to follow when clear thinking is crucial.

Most pages in the flip chart are divided into *specific* and *general* information "zones". If your nature center comes up with specific policies to follow, you can summarize those policies at the top of the page; the general information that follows can help in times of disaster if you have no firm policy in place and will prompt you regarding points to consider. By referring to the general entries, you can think of specific things to do. You also have the option of just using the general rules as your specifics; if you disagree with some, you can mark them out – or you can circle in red the steps you want staff to follow.

What often makes any sort of disaster manual unusable is the tone in which it is written. Phrases like "use the key in Marcia's office" or "water main cut off is behind the door to the old staff room" may make perfect sense to those who are filling out the guide or who have a long history with the nature center. Disaster manuals are not written especially for these types of people; one should write answers that will be obvious and clear to a stranger: a policeman or fireman who has never entered your building before, or for a staff person, volunteer or docent who is marking his or her first day on the premises. You must give information that needs no "translation" or that will not prompt further questions and slow down the process. A good test for this is to give a draft copy to a

friend, associate, or family member who does not work in your building, who can spot things that don't make sense to someone unfamiliar with your building or operations.

Another thing to think about in composing the answers for each section involves senior management. Depending on the crisis (and it may be necessary in all crises), the executive director, or head, or chief, no matter what title, usually expects to be informed. So please be sure to determine who in your administration should be contacted, on which issues, and note how to do it.

Now let's just get on with it; in an hour, you can have in place the beginnings of a basic immediate response manual to keep at each service desk. To better utilize your time, you might want to have at hand all the procedures that are already in place for your nature center, a staff chart showing hierarchy and telephone numbers, a floor plan of your building(s), and any information that might already be on hand about your building and its systems (air conditioning, heating, plumbing, fire suppression, detection and the like.) **To make sure that the information is correct and not out-dated, it is recommended that you check the information (phone numbers, etc.) *at least* once a year.**

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES (COVER PAGE)

Note that most of this first page is blank. To make sure it is labeled correctly so that staff (no matter how new or inexperienced) can immediately understand what this is, you should write in the name of your nature center, and/or your department. If you have a logo you can cut and paste (or tape) that here. Even if you have multiple copies with the same information all over the building, it might be best to note where each particular copy goes – circulation desk, reference desk, etc. It would be a very good idea to write the date that the information was compiled on the front cover, too, so people can know how dated, or not, the information is. You can also write a date for the flip chart to be updated on the front cover, too.

Even though the flip chart is pretty generic and should be easy to follow, staff will not be aware of what this is by its just appearing on a desk. Staff should be told what it is, shown how to use it, etc. It would be wise to have staff training on the most important elements; the manager of each department can walk staff through what is expected of them, what door to use evacuating, etc. You could also do an in-house training session to explain the flip chart and what it means. (You may also want to find out if disaster workshops are offered in your state) Once you've completed yours, you might want to consider hosting a workshop in your nature center. The more input that is sought from staff from the very beginning, the more staff will feel "ownership" in the manual. This may encourage people to use the chart, to become more aware of disasters and thus prevent them.

INFORMING THE PUBLIC and/or PRESS

Crises and disasters tend to bring out the best or the worst in people, including your members, the general public, and the press. In stressful times of disaster, your nature center may need the good will of its supporters – before anything else is fixed, some want to "fix" blame or name names. This is not the best thing to do. Nature centers that are forthcoming, and that give out necessary information in the proper format often weather crises better than those nature centers that appear disorganized, arrogant, blameful, or non-responsive.

Before any disaster strikes, it is recommended that your nature center develop a press release that is always handy and can be updated immediately. If for example, your nature center suffers a fire, you can gain support by having a statement like this ready:

The Lions and Tigers and Bears (oh my) Nature Center, founded in 1895 to preserve and protect the natural resources of our area has suffered a _____ on (date). At this point the cause is unknown and the extent of damage has not been determined.

Our center consists of 1,50 rare exhibits and modern books, contains twenty-two display cabinets of exhibits, owns museum pieces ranging from _____ to _____ and is supported with _____funds. Our staff of _____ is currently doing all it can to salvage the collection housed at our location at _____. Volunteers willing to help or make donations to our relief fund should contact _____ the following way: _____. Our executive director_____, and board members_____ join our staff in thanking the public for their understanding in this time of crisis.

The above is merely a suggestion, of course. Since, in disasters, people often say things that they may later regret; your nature center should delegate a calm, unflappable person who can respond to all calls from local television stations, radio stations and newspapers. List a back-up person, too, since the primary contact may be unavailable at some point.

MEDICAL EMERGENCY

If your nature center has developed, or is willing to develop, a response procedure, fill in the blanks at the top of the page and/or circle the general rules your staff should follow.

Things to think about include: whom should you call? 911? Or should you call someone on your campus or county or other infrastructure? Are there folks on your staff or in your building who are certified at CPR or any other life saving skills? How will you contact that person/agency if you are experiencing a power failure? (Many phone systems go down when the power does.) If you have to contact someone in your system before you are allowed to call 911, what happens after 5:00 p.m. or weekends when administration might not be on the premises? What should you do if you call public safety or some

similar unit and there is not a timely response? (You certainly can't plan for every contingency, but you should make a good faith effort to answer some "what if?"s.)

Larger nature centers, like some government-affiliated nature centers may already have developed a specific policy that all employees should follow. Try to discover if that is the case for your nature center. If so, summarize it on the flip chart, or indicate where the policy is posted. If there is anything like a legal department or a public safety department affiliated with your infrastructure, try to contact them for direction.

For telephone numbers, you may also want to include things like poison control, etc. that might already be posted somewhere in your building.

Many places have incident report blank forms ready to be filled out in case users of your building are hurt, or claim to be hurt, on the premises. Have these handy, and instruct staff to fill out as soon as possible.

Note: Human life and health are of primary importance. Yet it is a sad fact (which must be admitted) that some people may sue for injuries that are not your fault. That is why some of the language in the "general rules" section may seem callous, but may be necessary.

EXPLOSION & RANDOM ACTS OF VIOLENCE

Our society is increasingly dependent on technology and more and more vulnerable to technological mishaps, as well as to acts of violence from the public and/or staff. As much as we tell ourselves that this sort of thing can't happen in our building or town, it can. One need not be paranoid, but just appropriately aware. If you have a policy on what to do in case of a bomb, a shooting, an explosion of gas lines, etc. fill in the blanks, or note where the policy is posted.

Whom will you contact? 911? Who in your town/area etc. responds to bomb threats? (Read the section on phone threats, mail threats, and suspicious objects, to help prevent an explosion or similar damage from happening.) What will happen if the power goes out? Will your phones work? What phone will? Remember, too, that mobile phones or similar signal impulses *could* trigger something else.

The most important thing to think about is evacuation procedures. There is a section on that in this flip chart you can direct staff to use. Where are the emergency exits? Does staff know? Does your staff in certain areas have certain duties to perform in evacuations? What areas should you check? Since you shouldn't use elevators, how will those with mobility problems exit? Are flashlights available? Answer these questions and then summarize for the flip chart. Feel free to cover this page with a typed sheet you can lay over it. Draw a map of evacuation procedures and post on the bottom page.

Note, too, that once evacuated, staff and users, should neither stay near the building where glass may fall, etc., nor block public roadways, or doorways for emergency personnel to use. In evacuating your facility use caution and speed. Don't take bulky heavy objects with you, but if you can retrieve your purse, with car keys, etc., do so only if it will not slow you down or others. (You may not be allowed back in the building.) Check to see if there already is a countywide or system-wide policy to follow on these issues.

In a hostage situation or anything else of that nature, please direct staff not to take chances. All should leave the heroics to those trained to handle such situations.

FLOODING AND WATER DAMAGE

Statistics prove that millions of dollars of materials and records are destroyed or damaged each year by the effects of water, either from storms, leaking roofs, plumbing failures, construction accidents, etc. (And the staff in each and every of these nature centers probably all thought, "It can't happen here.") Some materials will be totally destroyed by water, some will be disfigured, and some can be repaired and reused – but only after vast expense of time and/or money. Only an insignificant amount of materials are damaged or destroyed by malfunctioning sprinkler systems – so don't use this as an excuse not to install a system in your building. (Many water-damaged objects can be repaired; things that turn to ash are ash forever.) There have been great technological advances in sprinkler systems – many do not contain water hovering overhead; most systems just activate a head at a time, and most damage comes from older systems and those not properly maintained.

No matter the source of water, its damage can be done quickly. Whom do you call? Your building supervisor? Your personal plumber? What happens if the disaster happens on a night or weekend? Do you know where your building's water turn-off is? How does one get to it? If it is behind locked doors, who has the keys? Think these things out and note them on the sheet. It is also wise to locate the water cut-off on a map.

Inexpensive plastic sheeting can often protect materials from water falling from above. It is a good idea to have some on hand, and note where it is stored. Even large plastic garbage bags may do in an emergency. Since most materials have to be salvaged in a short span of time, and since mildew can grow in wet environments, it may also be wise to note the availability of fans, folks you can call on for help, and vendors who can freeze and dry your materials for you, local refrigerator plants you can use, and even large vacant areas where you can move your materials to dry out. (This is in the field of disaster recovery, and beyond the scope of this flip chart, which is immediate response.) But what will help your immediate response and your ability to save materials is for you to do some thinking about your collections before hand. The collections most valuable to your mission should be moved out of danger first, should be covered with plastic tarps first, or should be kept off of bottom and top shelves where water damage might be the worst. You might also check on insurance to see what water emergencies are covered,

and what are not, if replacement or repair is an option, etc. Insurance may need you to document the damage, so you might need to take pictures of the damage as you clean up, and you might have to keep a list of all materials lost. Check first.

To prevent water emergencies, check catalogues or sprinkler vendors for water alarms that will sound if water is present. Get training for your staff on how to deal with water emergencies and have contacts to call *before* the disaster strikes.

CHEMICAL ACCIDENT

Again, like some of the previous disasters mentioned, we tend to believe that nothing of a chemical accident will happen to us: we work in nature centers. But dangerous, flammable chemicals maybe all around us, often in cleaning materials we use, in paints, solvents, sealants, materials used by contractors, and conservators, and the like – not to mention all those "miscellaneous" cans of unknown materials left in heating and air conditioning rooms and closets. (Note: Nothing flammable, not even paper or card board boxes, nothing at all, should be stored in heating, air conditioning and machinery rooms. Studies show that many fires start in rooms like this; materials stored in these rooms, often behind locked doors, will act as accelerants and can help make a fire out of control even before it is noticed. Take a tour of all these rooms; dispose of unneeded stuffs; and keep all flammables in locked fire-retardant cabinets designed for such uses. Never store paper or other flammable objects in stairways.) If there are liquids and similar materials you use all the time, get familiar with the labels – they will warn you what to do in case of spillage or poisoning. Note too that if a chemical fire results, or if a chemical spillage happens, fumes can be carried through the building by the air handling system. You may want to add information on how to contact or how to turn the system off. Poison control numbers, medical emergencies numbers, etc. are necessary to put down.

And as for extinguishers for chemical fire or any other, note that not all fire extinguishers can be used for all fires. Extinguishers should be checked periodically and their status noted. All are rated A, or B, or C or some combination. A fire extinguisher can be used to put out paper-based fires; B fire extinguishers are for grease based fires; C fire extinguishers are for electrical fires. If you used an A fire extinguisher that contains water, for example, on B or C fire, you can cause even more damage to yourself and feed the fire.

All fire extinguishers should not just be rated A, B, or C, or combination thereof (many have drawings of what type of fire(s) they will put out), but should say what comes out of the extinguisher. If there is a dry chemical that comes out of the extinguisher, the chemical may extinguish the fire, but start causing damage to the materials you just sprayed. So think these things out before you have to use them. Remember, it is often hard to think clearly and rationally in a period of intense aggravation. Do your planning before hand, so you can react appropriately when the time comes.

HURRICANE

Hurricanes can be tracked for days, but their erratic nature makes it difficult to predict where a hurricane will come ashore until a few hours before the event. It is therefore essential that staff prepare for a possible disaster before the threat is imminent and monitor closely advisories issued by the National Weather Service. Hurricanes bring storm surge which is limited to the coastal areas, but hurricanes also bring high winds, tornadoes, heavy rains and flooding so you can link this page via notes to the pages on power loss, water damage, and storms.

When will your staff begin to get ready for a hurricane? This normally will occur before of after a hurricane watch is announced, this means that a hurricane poses a threat to the area and will make landfall within 24 to 36 hours. Staff should verify phone numbers on the Emergency Recall list, review emergency equipment and begin to back up data on computers and take to an offsite location. The staff may begin emergency preparations. This will normally occur before of after a hurricane warning is announced and this means that a hurricane is expected within 24 hours.

You will want to consider turning off computers and unplugging other equipment, moving items away from windows, covering collections with plastic, etc. When will you close your nature center? What are your evacuation procedures? What are the safest areas in your building for patrons and staff?

In South Carolina hurricanes are inevitable as evidenced by the landfall of at least one major storm each year. Often coastal counties evacuate based on the category of the hurricane. If the power goes out and your phones go down, how will you connect to sources of information? Do you have a portable radio to help you monitor conditions? Do you have flashlights with batteries? Are you prepared to be self-sufficient for three days?

PHONE & MAIL THREAT; SUSPICIOUS OBJECT

These dangers demonstrate how difficult it often is to separate the issues of disaster prevention and disaster response. If staff becomes sensitive to these issues and deals with danger before it breaks out, tragedy often can be avoided. There are many cranks and pranksters in the world, but there are also troubled people who pick public and private nature centers to menace.

If you have already found out who in your area handles explosions and/or bomb threats, put that information here. Find the appropriate number to call – either someone in your nature cneter or 911. There is a section on the sheet where you can tell staff to call the police directly or not. Please make sure this is made clear and easy to discern. Don't be in the position of losing precious time when seconds count. Also think out before hand what to do if for some reason you can't use the phone. Follow and post all policies and procedures that may have already been formulated.

As for suspicious objects or phoned-in threats saying there is a bomb in the building, you can, to some extent, minimize the searching by keeping your building in order; if you have a room that is full of unknown boxes and objects, you will be hard-pressed to tell a police or fire man what belongs there and what does not.

Review the previous sections on evacuation. (It is discussed in EXPLOSION.) Get as far away from the building as possible, bringing, if possible, purses, etc. DO NOT block the way of emergency vehicles or persons.

POWER LOSS & EARTHQUAKE

Take a few moments to think and then list what will happen in your building/or department if the power goes off. Will the phone system fail? (If so, what is your backup – a mobile phone?) Will lights go on in emergency exits or not? Is there an emergency back-up generator? If so, what will it power? Will your public areas and offices be plunged into darkness? Even if there are windows in these areas, the whole place might still go black at night. Where are flashlights? Do they have batteries in them? Will your public address system go down, too? How will you be able to give information to patrons or staff? What should staff do to help patrons? Will emergency doors make sounds when they open? Should the power outage be reported? To whom? By whom? What will happen when the power comes back on? Will alarms sound? Will things like space heaters, empty coffeepots that were left on, and fans come back to life in the middle of the night when there is no one there to turn them off and reduce fire damage?

As for earthquakes, we tend to think of them as the most out of control situation one can be in – the earth is no longer solid, but moves under your feet! Yet, if one is in a seismically active area (find out if *you* are in a seismic area), you can still prevent some damage, by bolting shelves to walls and to each other; keeping valuable materials on shelves with guards to keep materials from falling off, keeping large unstable objects, like busts, storage boxes, etc. off of high shelves where they can topple and hurt people, etc. You can also inquire about earthquake insurance for your nature center and its collections. When an earthquake strikes, probably no one is going to stop and read the flip chart… that's why it is important for staff to have read it even before a disaster strikes.

TORNADO, STORM & WIND

Thunderstorms and tornadoes, on the other hand, often pop up with little or no warning, as do winter storms with freezing rain or other frozen precipitation. Policies to consider include turning off computers (to prevent loss of information), backing up data, using surge protectors, unplugging some equipment, staying off the telephone, etc. You decide what is appropriate and let others know. You can link this page, via notes, to the pages on power loss, and water damage, too, since these can also result, or you can summarize directly on this page. Again you will want to note the availability of other sources of

light, how to get weather information, what evacuation procedures exist, and which are the safest areas in your building for staff and patrons. You may need to check your larger infrastructure's policy about closing for storms. Is it ethical or legal to turn people out of your nature center at the height of a howling storm? What about children or those who may not have a mode of transport or who might be waiting for rides?

Winter storms can be just as disruptive. Often county agencies close upon certain conditions. If the power goes out, and your phones go down, how will you connect to sources of information? Where is a portable radio to help you monitor conditions? What do you have on hand – salt, sand, etc. – to help give the public and staff traction on frozen stairways and the like? Which exits are best to use in particular situations? Are all of your pipes insulated against freezing? Do they run on the outside or along the bottom or top of your building? What can you do to prevent them from freezing and bursting and damaging your building and contents?

FIRE

From ancient times, fire has been the bane of display institutions. Its effects are so devastating that fire should be avoided at all costs. All hazards should be removed, substandard wiring replaced, contractors monitored constantly (they are the causes of many nature center fires), all hazardous machines (space heaters, stoves, electric tea pots) watched and unplugged at night, and fire departments invited to your building to give you tips. Fire detection and suppression systems are invaluable. You need to know what types of systems are in your building – does it just detect fire? Or smoke? How? Whom does it call, or does it just sound an alarm? What does your suppression system do? Does it have water in the pipes at all times? What makes a sprinkler head trigger? Will it shut off after a time? Who maintains the system? How do you contact this person 24 hours a day? Behind what doors, needing what keys, is the system?

Do you have portable fire extinguishers? Where are they? Are they the right kind for the area? (See the short discussion under CHEMICAL ACCIDENT.) Are they in good shape? How heavy are they? Can staff use them? Has staff been trained how to use them? Does policy forbid staff using them? Is there signage showing where they are? What do they contain? What will happen to your displays if they are sprayed with the contents? Will you need a conservator to help clean up?

What is the correct evacuation procedure? (See the next one.) Can you draw a map of the evacuation routes and where the extinguishers are? Are the circuit breakers behind locked doors? How do you get to them? What happens to your air handling system? Will it keep running to help send the fire and noxious fumes to different parts of the building or will it shut off? How do you shut if off if necessary?

Even more basic: Whom do you call? 911? Or do you call someone else? How do you contact them if the power is out? Should senior management be contacted?

There is an endless series of questions to answer. Do it now, instead of having to ask yourself all these things while flames are roaring around you, people are screaming, and your life, your job, and your collections are in literal danger of going up in smoke.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

No doubt you have noticed by now how often this issue is mentioned in disaster response. Nevertheless, the value cannot be overstated: ***The saving and preserving of human life is any nature center's main concern in a disaster.*** Survival often depends on getting staff and patrons out of the building as quickly and as safely as possible. The importance of developing, practicing, and conducting emergency evacuations is a life and death issue.

Policies may already exist, so check. Draw maps for each area, or floor plans of the building, using different (easily differentiated) colors to show which exit should be used for each area of the building. Orient the map north, south, etc. so people not familiar with your building may quickly understand. Make the map basic and easy to read. Attach it here – on the bottom of the page, and/or include it on the final page of this flip chart. It is wise to post it in obvious places at each service desk, or office area, so that it cannot get buried. Evacuation drills may remind you of elementary school, but they are vital.

Work out how to help patrons, especially those with motor or cognitive problems, out of the building. Don't develop strategies dependent on particular individuals who may not be present when time to evacuate comes. Make sure stairways are always clear and never filled with materials that can slow down evacuees, or act as fuel for a fire. Try to get stairways (often with no windows) emergency lighting. Stress the foolishness of taking bulky objects with you; if keys and valuables can be retrieved quickly, do that, but no more. Life is more important than possessions. You may want to include a copy of this disaster flip chart to take with you out of the building for the maps and information and phone numbers it contains. Or you can just make sure that other copies of the flip chart are stored off-site in convenient to reach locations – your car, a neighboring building, your home, etc.

Remember to keep everybody moving so no bottlenecks occur at exits. Move as far away from the danger as possible. Do not block emergency vehicles or personnel. A good evacuation plan can mean the difference between life and death.

MAP, EMERGENCY EXITS & TELEPHONE TREE

The best often seems to be saved for last. This may not be the best sheet, but it is arguably the most important – it reiterates the emergency evacuation routes just discussed, and is a place to note other important features in a graphic, easy-to-read manner.

As mentioned frequently in these pages, disasters present moments when well thought out decision making is mandatory, but when it is often impossible to think rationally and

clearly. This is why all guides to disaster response and prevention stress the importance of creating a document that is not wordy, is easy to understand and which can be read quickly and unequivocally.

Maps are perfect for this. One does not have to trip over words, but can use pictures to help chart a course of evacuation or activity. Colors can help show different features, but be aware that some staff may be color-blind, and that colors may not be easily distinguishable with lights off or in a smoke-filled room. Always provide a key to the map (i.e. what certain symbols or colors mean) and always orient the map either by direction of N, S, E, & W – or by putting street names along sides of the building, whichever works best. If your building has several floors, you need a map of each floor; if you are sure a flip chart will be kept in a certain place, you can even orient the reader with a note, as in malls: "YOU ARE HERE." Think carefully what you want to put on the map, and try not to load it up with so much information that it is not readable. As you read over the flip chart, you might get ideas of what to place on the map; questions about the locations of various objects or exits have been posed; some may be helpful to pinpoint on a map. And you can always note that you have done that by saying, "See Map." Be creative: you can paste in a foldout map – legal sized or larger, or may post another map on the back of the flip chart, if noted. It would be a good idea to post the map in various other places that staff will see often; they can gradually "absorb" some of the information over time.

For the map, you might consider noting the location of:

- Emergency Exits
- Fire extinguishers
- The main water turn-off
- Various breaker boxes –for each floor, for the whole building, etc.
- Supplies to use in water and other emergencies
- Phones that will work with no power
- Flashlights
- Portable radios
- Cameras (if you need to document damage)
- First aid kits
- Place to wash off from chemical spills
- Safer areas for tornadoes and earthquakes
- Assembly areas after the building is evacuated
- Collections or displays that have top priorities for saving
- Areas with machines, dangerous equipment that must be disconnected
- Vital materials that may need to leave the building with you (only take small items such as money, computer back-ups, or membership lists, etc. You can avoid this mad last minute scramble by periodically storing copies of vital information off-site.)

Of course, if you pinpointed all of these, your map would be totally unreadable. Go for importance and clarity; or devise a number of maps, within reason. You can consider making maps for individual sheets in the flip chart, attaching them at the right place, or

noting a number for each map and putting them on the final page. Decide what is best for you.

Conclusion

We all know there are no total guarantees in our professional worlds; and no disaster manual is foolproof. But it is such basic common sense to take reasonable precautions to stave off disaster. (We do this in our personal lives by buying insurance, going to doctors regularly, and thinking through major decisions.) It has been proven over and over that nature centers that have put some thought and planning into responding to the unthinkable *do* often survive disasters better – with less damage to collections and health. We are all busy, but there is no good reason not to do this. Creating a disaster response manual may not prevent disasters (but could!), but can prevent "Monday morning quarterbacking." If you can prove to staff, members, the public, the press, senior administration, etc. that you did take reasonable precautions, you will survive disasters better personally and professionally. There is so much to gain – *and everything to lose!* For the sake of the materials entrusted to you, and the lives of those who work with you and depend on your nature center to make a living, spend an hour to two drafting replies, involving and informing staff, and updating frequently. Good luck!