

## **CALCON 2015**

### **Fires, Floods, and Locusts (er Bedbugs): Library Crisis and Communication Plans**

Thursday, October 22  
10:00am-12:00pm

### **Handouts**

#### **Floods: Estes Valley Public Library District**

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## **Floods**

### **Before**

#### **Training:**

- Western States and Territories Preservation Assistance Service (WESTPAS) Training: 2 full days and one half day
- More information: <http://westpas.org/>

#### **Outcome / Crucial Take-Aways:**

- Thought about and assigned- who would do what
- Gathered all information so that it was in one easy-to-access place- PReP Plan (Pocket Response Plan) and Reference notebook- one onsite and one offsite
- Met with Restoration Company ahead of time so that when flood occurred had a pre-existing relationship that could be called upon. This led to faster assistance / help.
- Became aware of gaps that needed to be addressed- i.e. Flood Insurance

### **During #1: Communication is EVERYTHING**

#### **Types of communication**

- Among Town leaders
- Among library staff
- From library staff to the public

#### **How it was handled**

##### **Internal / Leadership Communication**

- Library Director attended 7:30am Estes Park leaders' morning debriefing / information sharing.
- Library director led daily Admin Team meetings- every morning for about 10 days after the flood
- Daily bullet point staff emails- from Communications Designated (CD) staff member to the entire staff and the volunteers regarding what had happened that day and what the priorities for the next day were; included tasks and the people assigned to those tasks.
- Information relayed to the entire staff about staff members not onsite and their safety / well-being.

##### **External / To the Public Communication**

- Library Director and CD staff member working together for any media releases- staff knew that any and all communication went through this designee who then cleared it with the library director. All communication was centralized so that there was no miscommunication.
- Constant Contact emails to the patrons- keeping the public informed about the status of the Library and the materials checked out. This included programs cancelled or proceeding, hours that the Library would be open or closed, and information asking patrons to return DVDs but keep library books and donations for the Friends sale.

- CD taking the time to respond to individual patrons replies to the Constant Contact emails or routing these emails to the appropriate people when relevant.
- Other staff member designees handling Library's Facebook account and the website.
- Phone message system adjusted appropriately to reflect the situation.
- Circulation supervisor changed out the automatically generated "items due soon" emails so that they reflected the Library's need for people to hang on to items / don't put yourself at risk to return items / etc. She also saved these emails generated during the flood for future use if needed.
- Library director's emphasis on "Fact Only" communication. Staff stayed informed about the flood recovery via the Town's daily press releases; from CD's email re this: "This is **required reading** for staff each day. It's very critical that we stay informed—giving our community accurate information is key to everyone's well-being, recovery, and access to services."
- This communication extended to the display table where the Town's daily briefing handouts and other important and relevant information was available for the public to pick up.

## **During #2: Services to the Public**

- Closed the Library on the Thursday and Friday of the flood- decided after weighing the library's availability to the public versus public safety.
- Overflow of Town daily briefings- opening up the two public meeting rooms and streaming the Town broadcast to accommodate the public.
- Opened sections of the Library- the materials section with DVDs, magazines and new books; and the computer commons so that people could check email, etc. Also just being open, people had access to public wi-fi, which was helpful because a lot of people had no internet service.
- Circulation supervisor coached her staff to let patrons tell their story- listen to them, let them debrief.
- Kept certain area of the Library open 24/7 for public access to public restrooms for people in the no flush zone.
- Held the meeting rooms for overflow from the Town (streamed daily Town briefing) and then for Library's flood recovery (book storage) and other patrons needs re the flood.
- Humor very welcome: "Keep Calm and Potty On" book display.
- Get back to "normal" with programs as soon as is feasible- especially with pre-planned special events like "One Book, One Valley."

### **Children's Services Staff**

- Story time for kids at the schools- gave the teachers a break, a good constant because the kids know and recognize Children's Services staff. Went to the schools 4 times that first week. (The first week while the school was open there was no "school" in terms of normal "school.")
- Resumed Story Time at the Library the second week after the flood.
- Helped to sponsor and organize the Mountain Strong Kids event- "the kids needed an event too."

## **During #3: Crucial Components**

### **Absolute Key: Control the Message**

- To your staff- keep them well informed so that everyone knows what is going on
- To the public: no speculation or gossip, only relay and talk about what you know to be a fact. For the Estes Valley Library- as released through the Town of Estes Park's Public Information Officer and/or the Library's Communications Designee.

### **In the Midst of a Crisis: One Leader**

- There is only one leader, retain control of the situation and make certain that people are following through on your decisions

### **After / Lessons Learned**

- Start Admin Team briefings on day one- these did not start until day three.
- Staff self-care- monitoring: staff needs, sleep, eating, needed time off, etc.
- Leader must be extremely directive: embrace your inner “bossy pants.”
- Other lessons learned...

### **Preparedness Plan Created By**

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## **Libraries as First Responders**

### **Challenge/opportunity we addressed**

The High Park Fire in June of 2012 went from a plume of smoke to 20,000 acres of burning timber in 24 hours. Within a week over 53,000 acres were burning and over 3,000 people were evacuated from their homes. This was the week before our summer reading kickoff in the mountain communities, one site of our summer reading programs happen to be the fire station that was now the center of the fight. Our first thought was as these people are being evacuated they will need information. We can find the answers ó this is the expertise of librarianship. We also have value to add to the other first responders in that we can bring in equipment such as our mobile computer lab to the evacuation center. As part of the changing role of libraries we see librarians embedded into the community outside the walls of the traditional library building, which are transforming and positioning the libraries role in the community.

### **Key elements of innovation**

As soon as the fire broke out on June 9, 2012, the blaze forced over 1,000 people out of their homes and into the evacuation center looking for information. The Library District was able to have a quick response due to the fact that we had already made partnerships with other community organizations. The Outreach Services Manager and staff were able to contact the Larimer County communications office and suggested that they bring in the mobile laptop lab along with books and activities for the children while they spent their days waiting to see if they could get back to their homes. The decision- makers said they would find a space and the staff went to work. There was no written procedure on a library emergency response of this type so flexibility and determination to help went a long way with the other agencies like the Red Cross and Sherriff's Department. The Red Cross found the library staff especially helpful in helping non-computer users navigate and register on the Safe and Well site so that family members would be able to find out information about them. In working with various other first responder agencies the library staff was able to become the liaisons to our Library District so we could send updated information from the briefings immediately so that our customers got the information sometimes before the media did. The importance of vetted information in an emergency situation became extremely important as bogus websites and twitter feeds popped up. A centralized information center was created on the library website.

### **Achieved outcomes/lessons learned**

Libraries can be responsive and relevant. The library can bring an added-value to an emergency situation with trained staff, resources and information management. We learned that they are a time of crisis, people don't want to be separated from their children so we needed to work on the space that they gave us. We became the go to people for children's programming, stuffed animals that were donated by the truckload. Our established presence at the evacuation center became a welcome site where the Red Cross as well as other emergency managers were sending evacuees to find information or just to get a break from the stress by finding books and games to use during the long hours of waiting. We learned valuable lessons of managing in an emergency and gained positive press as result of our efforts. Our response required the involvement of many people; most of them working quietly behind the scenes and securing all resources were ready. Many of the lessons were learned on the go and we had to create a system to quickly adapt and make changes. The result was not only the satisfaction of serving so many of our evacuated patrons, young and old, but knowing that the public in general and all of the involved first responders and agencies discovered the value of libraries for their community.

## **High Park Fire by the Numbers (6/9/12 to 7/1/12)**

- 87,284 acres burned
- 259 homes and 112 other structures destroyed
- 1 death
- 2037 personnel assigned, 170 engines, 19 helicopters, 5 tankers
  
- Calls to 5500 Emergency #: 18,965
- Media Calls: 1,676
- Press Releases: 149
- Press Conferences: 44
- Emergency Website Updates: 124
- Everbridge Emergency Notifications: 19,772
- Facebook Updates: 340
- Tweets: 340 (Twitter followers increased 270 to 2946)
- Citizen Meetings: 36
- Calls to Structure Verification line: 602
- New LETA sign-ups in the first 10 days of the fire: 7,547

## **Analysis of needs vs resources**

What do you have?

- Rooms
- Computer access
- Phone access
- Bomb shelter
- AV equipment
- Information
- Staff
- Entertainment

What can we do?

- Send staff
- Send volunteers
- Send resources
- Give over facilities
- Stay open more hours
- Turn up the air conditioning

## **Lessons Learned**

- Gain community advocates
- NCPC, Emergency managers
- Plan for an event, and hope it never happens
- Concert, parade, fair

## **Fires, Floods and Locusts (er, bedbugs): Library Crisis and Communication Plans**

October 22, 2015

### **Question:**

What is a crisis?

### **Answer:**

Anything you think it is.  
Or, Any activity that focuses  
immediate public attention on your organization.

### **Why news media and social media coverage is important**

- Accurate, balanced news coverage of library activities is an important first factor in gaining voluntary compliance, public support and customers.
- The news media and social media followers are highly effective means of disseminating information and creating public awareness.
- Announcing news (that is, taking action) is usually preferable to reacting to a reporter's calls.
- A proactive approach provides your library with more control over the final message because you can research the subject and determine when, how, where and to what extent you will disseminate information.

### **Basic news media philosophy**

- Be open and responsive to the media by providing information requested in a timely manner.
- Actively publicize the library's services and activities.
- Assist reporters as much as possible in setting up interviews or arranging background filming.
- Not allow any interference in library operations, service to the community or privacy of customer accounts.

### **News Media Policy**

#### **Guidelines for Handling Routine Calls**

1. Handle news media calls at the highest appropriate level.
2. Prepare for all interviews.
3. Return news media calls before reporters' deadlines.
4. State the most important points first.
5. After you answer, stop talking.
6. Stick to the facts.
7. Don't be pressured into answering an unreasonable question.
8. Always tell the truth.
9. Avoid saying "no comment."

10. Avoid speculating.
11. Avoid speaking off the record.
12. Serve as a professional representative of your library every time you speak to a reporter.
13. Give competing news media equal access to major news stories.
14. Remember your rights as an interviewee.
15. Establish a good working relationship with reporters.
16. Use your public relations/communications office as a resource.

## **Crisis Communications**

### **Basic guidelines**

1. Establish a crisis management team.
  - a. Include representatives from security, human resources, facilities, legal counsel, senior management and public relations/communications team.
2. Identify potential crises on a consistent basis.
  - a. Ongoing issues – environmental (snow, tornado, fires, insects/animals), structural (building issues), personnel (layoffs), critical customers (angry/dissatisfied), municipal/legislative (funding, budget, use of public funds).
3. Establish one spokesperson and a chain of command when that person cannot represent the library.

### **Plan of Action**

1. Immediately report to the library director or public relations office any issue or incident that could have a negative effect on the library's public image.
2. Gather all personnel and information required to determine the appropriate media strategy.
3. Implement the determined plan of action.
4. After the crisis has passed, evaluate your organization's response to the crisis.

### **What do the media expect in a crisis?**

1. Complete, honest information. Never lie or speculate.
2. Background material. Maps, photos, fact sheets.
3. What the library plans to do next.
4. Regular updates and follow-ups.

### **Before trouble hits**

- Think what might go wrong.
- Develop a written plan with procedures, responsibilities and systems clearly defined.
- Let all staff and volunteers know what their role is if a crisis develops.
- Rehearse or "act out" responses to possible problem situations.
- Maintain updated information files and media contact lists (including social media).

### **If trouble hits**

- Assemble the crisis team and work the plan.
- Take a proactive stance with the media.
- Provide timely, accurate information updates throughout the process.
- Let everyone (media, employees, customers, volunteers) know when the crisis is over.

### **Tips for public relations/communications offices**

- Keep phone numbers handy. Get home and emergency phone numbers for key players in the library.
- Keep a media list (phone, email, Twitter)
- Keep copies of staff lists at satellite locations.
- Keep some supplies at home or available via the web.
- Get to know your legal counsel.
- Get to know your local police and public information officers.
- Familiarize yourself with library confidentiality laws, privacy policy, child safety policy, Colorado Law 24-90-119, ALA & CAL Intellectual Freedom Information.

### **For more information:**

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