

## **S.O.S: Responding to Safety and Security Concerns in Libraries**

by

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**Conference Abstract:** What would you do if parents reported they had lost their child in the library? How would you ensure the safety of staff and patrons if a tornado was headed your way? This program provides ideas for creating effective disaster and safety plans for a variety of situations.

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This article will cover the following safety and security concerns:

<b>Safety</b>	<b>Security</b>
General safety concerns	Problem patrons
Disaster planning	Violence prevention
Fires	Civil unrest
Water leaks from ceiling	Violence
Water damage	Theft
Tornadoes	Lost child
Disaster recovery response	

### **General Safety**

Some safety issues don't fall easily into a particular category. The following general safety procedures can be practiced by all library staff:

- Immediately report electrical problems to administration and maintenance to prevent personal injury or equipment damage.
- Periodically check shelves for warps or other indications of weaknesses.
- Keep all walkways clear of safety hazards.
- Monitor placement of ladders and stepstools.
- Always use proper body mechanics.
- Immediately report any unsafe conditions, unsafe practices, and accidents to administration.

- Turn off all defective equipment and tag it as "do not use or operate until repaired."
- Maintain a list of staff currently certified in CPR and First Aid.

## Disaster Planning

To help ensure that you respond to a disaster effectively, you should create a comprehensive disaster plan. Steps to take in creating a plan follow:

- Create a Disaster Recovery Team.
- Create a disaster preparedness plan and assign tasks.
- Create drill checklists and assign tasks.
- Conduct drills on a regular basis.
- Ensure that emergency supplies are on hand.
- Periodically inventory supplies to ensure that sufficient quantities are on hand.

Here is a list of emergency supplies to have on hand:

Flashlights	Batteries	Plastic trash bags
Plastic sheeting	50 foot extension cord	Plastic buckets
Safety glasses	Portable fans	Mop
Plastic trash cans	Rubber gloves	First aid kits
Dehumidifier	Sponges	Rubber boots and aprons
Metal cart	Paper towels	Clipboards, pens, & markers

## Fire

Fire is an ever-present danger. It may originate within the building or threaten from the outside. It is important that all staff be educated as to the prompt actions to take to minimize danger and risk of injury.

Be prepared for a fire:

- Regularly test your alarm system.
- Make sure that fire extinguishers are checked for serviceability and functions according to local laws and requirements.

- Post evacuation plans by the doors in all rooms.
- Designate a safe area at least 150 feet away from the building for everyone to gather in case of fire.
- Designate appropriate people for tasks on fire drill checklist.
- Conduct fire drills regularly.
- Make note of what went right and wrong during drills and make changes to checklists as needed.

Drills should be carried out periodically - such as annually - so that all staff members are familiar with proper procedures. Provide an announcement of an upcoming drill so that instructions may be given and procedures followed. For fire drills, use the following - or a similar - checklist.

### Fire Drill Checklist

Duty	Person
Time the drill.	
Sound the alarm.	
Open exterior doors.	
Man exit doors.	
Close interior doors.	
Clear rooms of occupants.	
Guide library users to safety.	
Conduct staff roll call.	
Provide all-clear signal.	

When responding to a fire, remember the acronym R-A-C-E. If it is possible to do so without putting anyone in harm's way, rescue those persons who are closest to the fire. Sound the alarm and dial 911 to alert the fire authorities. If possible, confine the fire with a fire extinguisher. Evacuate the building.

When evacuating for a fire, evacuate the building immediately, using predetermined routes and exits. If time permits, windows should be closed by a designated staff person. After ensuring it is empty, the last person to leave a room should close its door. Staff should immediately go to exits to guard doors and assist with crowd control and direct evacuees to the

designated evacuation area. Evacuations should be conducted in an orderly fashion with no running. They should also be conducted quietly with no talking to minimize confusion and allow all announcements to be heard. Evacuees should meet in a designated area and stay at least 150 feet from the building.

### **Water Leaks and Water Damage**

In the event of a water leak, cover affected shelves and computer stations with plastic sheeting. If possible, use trash cans or other containers to catch water. Notify administration and maintenance.

In the event of water damage, turn off heat. Turn on air conditioning if possible. Create free circulation of air with fans and a dehumidifier. Mold will grow within 48 hours if the temperature is above 70 degrees Fahrenheit, the humidity is above 60%, and airflow is poor. Do not open wet books, do not separate single sheets, and do not remove covers. When removing books from shelves, hold them firmly closed. Also hold them closed while cleaning or packing; mold is less likely to grow inside a closed book.

### **Tornado Watches and Warnings**

A tornado watch means that conditions are favorable for the development of tornadoes. A tornado warning means that an actual tornado has been spotted or indicated by radar signatures.

To be prepared for a tornado warning, you must take appropriate actions during the tornado watch. During a tornado watch, prop open interior doors to facilitate movement to shelter areas. Monitor weather alerts through radio or other dependable means. Ensure that all rooms designated as preferred shelter areas are unlocked. Do not open windows.

Tornado drills should be carried out periodically - such as annually - so that all staff members are familiar with the proper procedures. Provide an announcement of an upcoming drill so that instructions may be given and procedures followed.

Create a tornado drill checklist that indicates responsibilities for designated staff. For tornado drills, use the following - or a similar - checklist.

## Tornado Drill Checklist

Duty	Person
Prop interior doors.	
Monitor weather alerts.	
Unlock all rooms designated as shelter areas.	
Announce tornado warning and state where to take cover.	
Stand at doorways to shelter areas and direct library users into them.	
Instruct library users in how to take cover.	
Provide all-clear signal.	

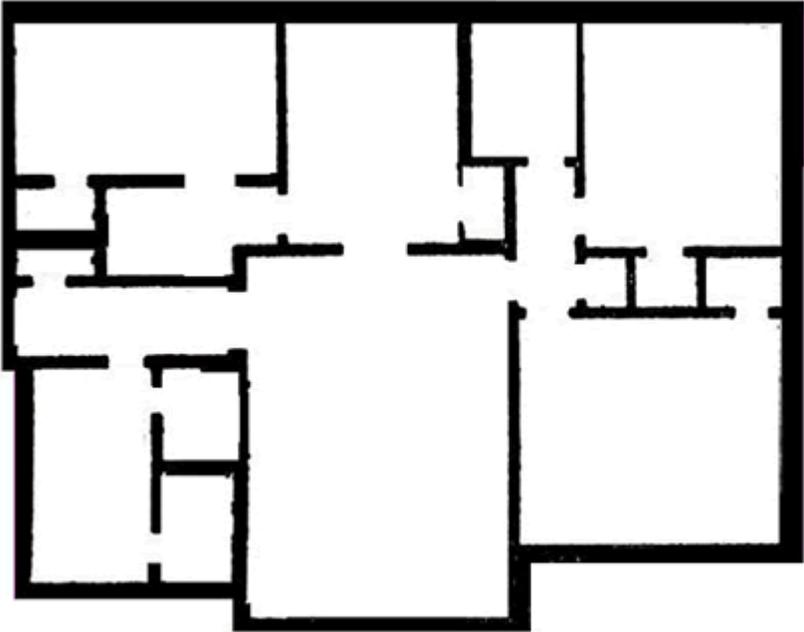
If there is sufficient time to take shelter in the event of a tornado warning, the following actions should be taken:

- Staff members need to ensure that library users reach their shelter areas quickly, quietly, and in an orderly manner.
- Staff members should be the last person to leave rooms and should check to make sure all library users are in shelter areas.
- Staff members should advise patrons against taking shelter in anywhere but a designated area.

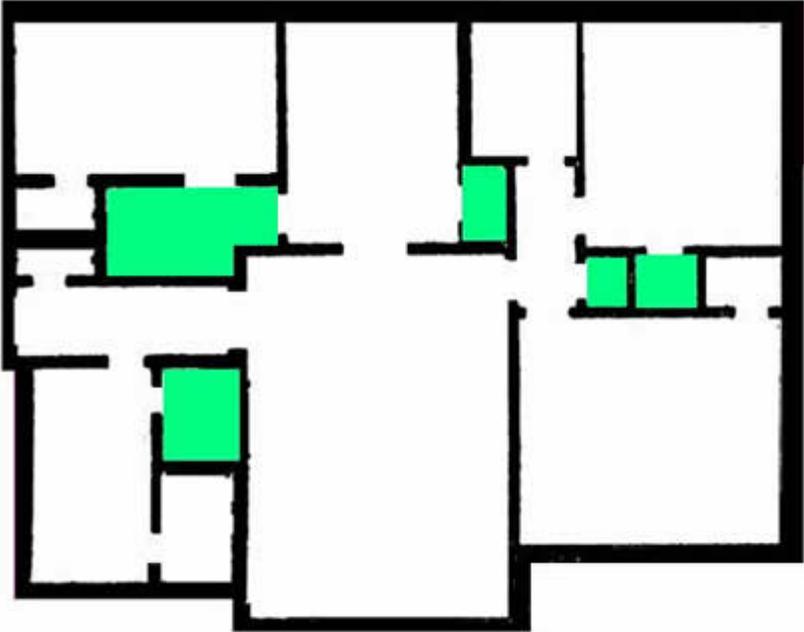
In taking cover, persons should assume the position for greatest safety by crouching on their knees with their heads down and their hands locked at the back of their necks. If possible, crouch under a bean bag or table. If pillows, blankets, or couch cushions are available, use them to shield your body against flying debris.

As to where to take cover, persons should take shelter on the ground floor in small interior rooms with no outside walls and a closed door. If such a room is not available, shelter can be taken in ground-floor hallways away from glass windows and doors. If neither of these options is available, persons should take shelter against interior walls located furthest from exterior walls. Do not take cover under chandeliers. Remember that books will become dangerous projectiles so take cover as far as you can from the stacks. Under no circumstances should persons go outside.

**Figure 1.** Where do you take cover in this building?



**Figure 2.** The green areas are where to take cover.



## **Disaster Recovery Response**

A proper response to a disaster can lessen its effects. Here are some tips for effectively responding to a disaster.

Assemble and carefully brief the Disaster Recovery Team, giving complete information on the dangers of proceeding except as exactly directed. Failure to follow procedure may incur further damage and cost. Team objectives are to stabilize the condition of damaged materials and to recover the maximum amount of material in a manner that will minimize future restoration costs.

Cooperate with all health and safety personnel to make sure that the damaged library is safe to enter. Establish the nature and degree of damage to library collections and equipment. Prioritize salvage operations; the objective is to recover the majority of the collection in the best condition to avoid additional harm and cost of post-disaster damage.

## **Library Security**

### **Problem Patrons**

When confronted with a problem patron, contact another staff member or security guard for assistance and to serve as a witness. An additional person allows for the presentation of a united front. Don't make accusations without sufficient evidence. Do not assume that anything - like a theft - has occurred unless you actually saw it take place.

Ask the perpetrator to cease the offending behavior. If offending behavior justifies it, contact a security guard or police. What do you do if he or she does not cease the offending behavior? Ask him or her to leave the premises immediately and advise him or her that if he or she remains, the police will be called. Give the patron several warnings before calling the police.

In the case of squatters, provide the patron with directions to a homeless shelter and any other needed community resources.

## **Violence**

Luckily, violence rarely erupts in libraries, but it is a possibility nonetheless.

Violence often begins with inappropriate behavior or signs that, when detected and reported, may help prevent its occurrence. Report all inappropriate behavior to administration and security. Be aware of what is going on around you at all times. Awareness is a proven method for increased personal safety.

If violence occurs or there is an immediate threat of violence, instruct bystanders to leave the area immediately and then leave the area yourself if possible. If you can not leave the area, try to lock yourself in a secure area. If possible, dial 911 and give the dispatcher as many details as possible.

In the event of civil unrest, call 911. Protect important records. Stop all incoming traffic to the library except police, fire trucks, and emergency vehicles. Ask participants orally and in writing to disperse and cease activities. Notify participants orally and in writing of possible punishments.

In the event of a hostage situation, dial 911, if possible, and supply as many details as possible including the number of persons involved and a description of the hostage takers, weapons displayed, and threats made. Do what you are told without argument. Do not attempt to negotiate or argue with the hostage taker. Try to get others to remain calm. Tell others to do what they are told.

## **Theft**

Theft is a chronic problem in most libraries. Here are some tips on how to prevent thefts:

- Lock up the items that are most likely to be stolen.
- Monitor keys to locked items - keep a check-out form or list of people with keys.
- Check nooks and crannies periodically - especially those near exits; patrons may hide items there so that they can steal them later.
- Make note of patrons who loiter near nooks and crannies.
- Watch for suspicious behavior.

- Report items found in odd locations; consider locking up items repeatedly found in odd locations.
- Report missing items to administration and security immediately.
- Contact local law enforcement as necessary.

## **Lost Child**

What should you do if a child is lost in your library? Use Code Adam.

There are six steps to Code Adam.

1. When a patron reports that a child is missing, the staff member obtains a detailed description of the child and what he or she is wearing.
2. The staff member pages Code Adam, describing the child's physical features and clothing. Designated employees monitor all entrances and exits while all other employees begin looking for the child.
3. If the child is not found within 10 minutes, call law enforcement.
4. If the child is found and appears to have been lost and unharmed, the child is reunited with the searching family member.
5. If the child is found accompanied by someone other than a parent or legal guardian, use reasonable efforts to delay their departure without putting the child, staff, or patrons at risk. If appropriate, notify law enforcement and provide details about the person accompanying the child.
6. The Code Adam page will be canceled after the child is found or law enforcement arrives.

Starting a Code Adam program in your library is easy. There is no cost to participate in the Code Adam program. Simply fill out the form on the website below, and the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) will mail you a free Code Adam kit. The kit includes a training video to show your staff members, a break-room poster explaining the program steps, and two decals to put on entrances announcing your participation in Code Adam. The Code Adam sign-up form is available at [http://www.missingkids.com/missingkids/servlet/PageServlet?LanguageCountry=en\\_US&PageId=589](http://www.missingkids.com/missingkids/servlet/PageServlet?LanguageCountry=en_US&PageId=589)

Your local FEMA office should have the following free resource, or similar document.

Liebsch, B., & Liebsch, J. (1999-2005). *It's a disaster!...and what are you gonna do about it?: A disaster preparedness, prevention & basic first aid manual* (4th ed.). Tuscon, AZ: Fedhealth.

Every library needs policies and procedures for dealing with safety and security issues. Proper execution of effective procedures can make a significant difference in the severity of the effects of safety and security incidents.