Access the Web – Fire Plans

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Several times this past summer, I was sitting in my office and the library's fire alarm went off. The fire doors would come rumbling down from the ceiling and the staff would all look at each other as if to say, "Do you know what's going on here?" The students and faculty meanwhile would be sitting at their tables or working in the lab, or otherwise going about their business as if nothing had happened. The alarm would get turned off by calling facilities or campus police, and the day would go on. A couple of times it was found that smoke in one of the library's mechanical rooms was one of the problems. This was a bit frightening to me, as it could have turned into something worse. Our library had a business continuity plan; detailing how to continue operations should we have a catastrophic event. However, there was little to say what to do to prepare for an emergency in advance of it happening, or even what to do should a real emergency occur.

I began to look around and saw that many libraries had disaster recovery plans, but I was on the search for those that had prevention and action plans. I was pleased at what I have found, and below you find my reviews of several. From my research I have worked with our library's disaster planning committee to develop our own fire plan, arrange for fire drills, and have fire safety training for staff. It's so easy to think about getting around to creating a plan and having drills one day when things are a bit more caught up or to be thankful when you hear of an impending disaster that it wasn't your library this time. However, next time it could be.

Evergreen State College - TESC Library Evacuation Plan

http://www.evergreen.edu/facilities/emergency/docs/libraryevacuationplanjan2010.pdf

Evergreen provides a fairly comprehensive evacuation plan. Comprehensive plans are great for planning for emergencies and following up afterward, by clearly detailing all that needs to be done and how it should be accomplished. The Evergreen plan outlines the purpose of the plan, review basic evacuation procedures, and the basic staff responsibilities everyone in the building should know in case of an evacuation. They have also formed a Library Evacuation Team – and this team includes members from each library work unit. These individuals have specific duties prior, during and after an emergency. The plan also includes information about emergency equipment available, as well as maps of the library with evacuation routes noted. A specific section was included dealing with the computer lab – which in many libraries today is an integral part of an often combined information center, but which may or may not be directly run by the library itself. If not run directly by the library, including them in planning becomes even more necessary as staff must work cooperatively across units. I also like that they include some basic instructions for using the hand held radios, as in an emergency situation technical issues are the last thing you want to have to deal with.

Interlochen Public Library Fire Safety and Evacuation Plan

http://www.interlochenpubliclibrary.org/aboutipl/documents/Fire%20Safety%20Evac%20Plan.pdf

The plan implemented by Interlochen is short and sweet, covering just the basics in a one page format. It includes a plan for evacuation, a brief list of staff responsibilities, and information about conducting regular fire drills. This brief approach is useful, especially during an emergency when time is of the essence and a longer plan more difficult to navigate. I especially like their inclusion of a clause to review the plan quarterly with staff, to hold quarterly fire drills, and to review/update the plan annually. Too often such plans are made and then archived somewhere in the Library not to see the light of day until the next eon. Keeping the plans current and keeping staff knowledgeable of handling such situations, such as through drills, is a key component of planning for such emergencies.

University of Maryland, Baltimore – Marshal Law Library Fire Evacuation Plan

http://www.evergreen.edu/facilities/emergency/docs/libraryevacuationplanjan2010.pdf

This plan is another example of the more comprehensive type of fire evacuation plan. I like that it immediately at the top lists emergency numbers – a way to include a brief plan for in the midst of an emergency within a longer, more detailed plan. They do a good job of backing up their plan with the actual fire safety regulations of the university and city, but this makes it rather cumbersome to read in the event of a real emergency, though it will be an asset when planning or explaining particular procedures. The inclusion of evacuation duties and staff assignments, such as in this plan, is always a bonus in actually carrying a plan to fruition during an actual emergency. They also include the duties of University Police, Facilities Management, occupants, and other involved groups of individuals, though information on how these duties are communicated to those bodies is not included. It is encouraging to see an entire section of the plan devoted to how to evacuate those persons that need assistance – a group that is not included in all evacuation plans but needs to be considered. It is important to include ADAAA provisions in evacuation plans. One final note about this plan is the uniqueness of the inclusion of a section on daily fire safety practices – a list of things everybody can do daily to help prevent fires from occurring in the first place.

The University of North Carolina Wilmington Randall Library Disaster Preparedness Plan

http://library.uncw.edu/policies/disaster_preparedness_plan#fire

UNCW, the coastal branch of the UNC System, has an online disaster preparedness plan, which includes a section on fire emergencies, along with power outages, thunderstorms, hurricanes, etc. Preparedness and Procedures for Fire Emergencies and General Fire and Emergency Evacuation Procedures are the main sections devoted to dealing with fires – and are both brief and to the point, providing just the information needed to begin dealing with the emergency. However, the real meat of the plan as far as fires are concerned is in the final appendix to the plan – though still brief it provides a few more specific directions to follow in case of a fire emergency, duties that are to be carried out not by a specified individual but buy whoever is alerted by the fire alarm. This last provision helps when you are unsure what given staff may be on hand should an emergency occur, but could also lead to duplication of effort in other environments. Provisions for assisting persons who need help evacuating are also included. Maps are not included in the plans but are kept in print at the circulation desk, should they be needed.

Central Library Evacuation Plan

libstaff.**library**.vanderbilt.edu/**central**/EVAC.DOC

Central has one of the most detailed plans I have seen – with plans included for each floor and wing and for day time and night time. Specific individuals are named as implementers of the plan in their assigned areas. The format is to name the responsible persons, followed by a brief list of procedures for them to all follow in their assigned areas. This type of plan would be helpful for a large library with a great deal of floors to evacuate and a large staff to implement the evacuation plan in a coordinated manner. They also include a one page Quick Response Sheet that is excellent for quick reference in the thick of a situation. It covers basic directions on what to do and who to call, and would be great to have on hand for staff. The plan also includes some basic checklists for ensuring that evacuations have been completed successfully.

University of Regina Fire Safety Manual

http://www.uregina.ca/hr/assets/files/health_safety/fire%20safety/Fire_safety_manual.pdf

Regina has an incredibly thorough plan, which is also organized very effectively, but that would benefit from an index or table of contents to ease navigation. The plan is for the University as a whole, which would include the library. My main reason for including it is its thoroughness, despite the fact that I could not locate the fire alarm procedures or diagrams for the library as that section is in the library's building manual, which I was unable to locate online. The plan effectively covers needed phone numbers, training of staff, fire drill procedures and evaluations, and responsibilities of assigned staff positions. There is a handy one page Instructions For Building Occupants, which would be a good model handout for posting around the building for patron information purposes.

Bay County Library System Fire Evacuation Policy

http://www.baycountylibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/Fire-Evacuation-Policy-12-16-09.pdf

Bay County strikes a nice median between brevity and thoroughness with their fire evacuation plan. Right from the beginning it notes that administration will train employees in fire evacuations and that drills will be conducted semi-annually, as well as record keeping related to fire safety and evacuations. This mention of both drills and record keeping are important – knowing what to do and what has happened before are key parts of dealing with emergency situations. It also includes a section on evacuating those with disabilities. The plan covers what individuals should know in advance of an emergency, what to do if a fire is discovered, the fire evacuation plan, and how drills will be conducted. It is a short plan, but all the key points of dealing with a fire emergency are covered effectively, showing that you don't have to have a large scale plan to be thorough. The plan should fit the library in size and scope.

Wayne State Universities Library Fire Emergency Procedures

http://www.lib.wayne.edu/info/policies/safety/facilities/fire.php

The fire plan for Wayne State Universities Library is part of its overall safety and security policies and procedures manuals for the libraries of Wayne State – actually comprised of several buildings. A menu on the right side of the page allows you to navigate to specific sections of the plan - such as the fire emergency procedures section. It includes responding to a fire, general procedures for staff and patrons, and fire survival skills – basic things anyone should know when dealing with fires but that are good reminders for during times of panic and emergency. After the general sections, detailed evacuation plans are given for the different library buildings by floor, with specifics also on the evacuation of the disabled. This is a good example for large university with many branches on campus, as a single model can be used for all libraries, with details added for specific buildings.

Central University Libraries Evacuation Plan for Fondren Library Center

http://smu.edu/cul/staffres/evacflc.pdf

Central is another example of a very brief plan, easy to refer to in an emergency, yet covering the basic requirements of an effective fire safety/evacuation plan. One point that it stresses that I did not see in all other plans, though it is in some, is that staff should direct and monitor evacuations of patrons to the extent that personal safety allows. Fire plans are good, but staff should be trained that if they fear for their personal safety, the plan is secondary to getting themselves out of the building and referring remaining evacuation to trained emergency personnel – fire, police, etc. This plan also includes a statement on the extent of the evacuation – stating all areas should evacuate – a perhaps useful statement to have when evacuating multiple areas that may not notice the threat and unduly feel they are safe and therefore not wish to evacuate. Also included are sections on assisting patrons with disabilities, who participates and who is in charge of evacuations, sections on strategy, evacuation reporting/accountability, and staff evacuation assignments.

University of Southampton HSL Fire Evacuation Plan

http://www.soton.ac.uk/library/about/safety/hsl-fireevacuationplan.pdf

Southampton's plan doesn't have the organizational structure of some plans, but does provide a great deal of useful information, especially by including the library's floor plan and designating the evacuation zones on them. These pages are great examples of floor plans and evacuation routes that could be reproduced for posting to inform patrons during emergencies, as well as to direct staff. Like some places that have differences in operations due to staffing at different hours, Southampton has a weekday plan, as well as plans for lower staffing levels. It also includes a follow up procedure by having a form for reporting evacuations. It serves as another short but effective model.