

Disaster Information Specialist: An Emerging Subject Specialty for Informationists?



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OBJECTIVES OF THE DISASTER INFORMATION SPECIALIST PROJECT

- 1) Determine roles for librarians in providing disaster information outreach to their communities and in responding to information needs for all-hazards preparedness, response and recovery.
- 2) Describe the possible position titles and duties of a “disaster information specialist.”
- 3) Assess the need for a national training curriculum and certification program for librarians interested in disaster information.

WHAT DO YOU CALL A PERSON INTERESTED IN DISASTER INFORMATION?

IN REALITY...



IN THE FUTURE...? WILL THIS BECOME A PRIMARY OCCUPATION FOR SOME?

DISASTER KNOWLEDGE + LIBRARY SKILLS =



IDENTIFYING ROLES FOR LIBRARIANS

Identify a range of appropriate activities and useful roles for libraries and librarians that would aid and enhance disaster preparedness, response, and recovery and inspire libraries to add “disasters” to their mission.

LEARNING BY DOING...

In 2008, the National Library of Medicine’s Disaster Information Management Research Center invited six libraries to experiment with diverse projects to meet the disaster information needs of their parent institutions. The libraries vary in size, experience with disaster health information, and source of financial support. Each library decides what activities they would like to pursue in providing disaster information. By actually doing projects, the librarians will have a range of experiences that may be useful in describing their roles and assessing their own training needs.

Project partner libraries:

- Ehrman Medical Library, New York University School of Medicine, New York, New York
- E. R. Stitt Library, National Naval Medical Center, Bethesda, Maryland
- NIH Library, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland
- Suburban Hospital Medical Library, Bethesda, Maryland
- James A. Zimble Learning Resource Center, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, Bethesda, Maryland
- Bishopric Medical Library, Sarasota Memorial Hospital, Sarasota, Florida

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCES IN DISASTERS...

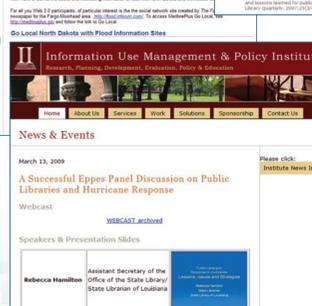
Many librarians have shared their disaster experiences through:

- Oral history interviews of librarians directly affected by major disasters.
- Reporting “as it happens” on Regional Medical Library blogs, the NN/LM Emergency Preparedness & Response Toolkit and the DISASTR-OUTREACH-LIB listserv.
- Webinars, classes, posters, and conference presentations featuring librarians’ experiences.

The Cornflower blog for the National Networks of Libraries of Medicine Greater Midwest Region posted news of flooding in North Dakota and Minnesota in April 2009.



Compiled by Joanna Karpinski as part of an NLM Associate Fellow project.



Public Libraries and Hurricane Response panel webinar from the College of Information, Florida State University.

LEARNING FROM THE LITERATURE AND FROM RESEARCH...

- Journal articles, news stories and published first-hand accounts.
- Research at library schools on librarians’ perceptions of possible roles for the profession in a disaster.
- Analysis of answers to Robin Featherstone’s interview question, “What, in your opinion, are the roles for librarians and libraries in disaster planning, response and recovery efforts?”

Featherstone concluded there were eight broad categories of:

- Institutional supporters – activities on behalf of the parent university
- Collection managers
- Information disseminators
- Internal planners
- Community supporters
- Government partners
- Educators and trainers for emergency responders for library colleagues
- Information community builders

Sharing Disaster Stories: As NLM Associate Fellows, Robin Featherstone gathered those stories and Emily Vardell created this information.



BUILDING AWARENESS OF DISASTER ROLES — TRAINING FOR DISASTERS AVAILABLE NOW...

- DISASTR-OUTREACH-LIB listserv and efforts to build a “community of practice” among interested librarians.
- Guest speakers and discussions featured in monthly conference calls for Disaster Information Specialist Program participants.
- Speakers and classes at local, regional and national professional meetings.
- Lectures and project opportunities for National Library of Medicine Associate Fellows.
- Disaster resources page for every state at <http://nmlm.gov>, the National Network of Libraries of Medicine web site.
- Inclusion of disaster roles for information professionals in the curriculum of some library schools.
- Community disaster preparedness and response training from the American Red Cross, local Community Emergency Response Teams, online courses from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), etc.

AVAILABLE IN THE FUTURE?...

- National advisory group to identify essential skills for disaster information outreach by information professionals.
- National curriculum based on these essential skills.
- National certification offered by a professional association, perhaps MLA?