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## Building Maintenance and Emergency Preparedness

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## Spotlight On CONSTRUCTION

### Building maintenance and emergency preparedness

by Kathryn Ames and Greg Heid

One of the challenges of managing a public library is dealing with maintenance issues and emergency situations. State and local governments have a huge investment in the library buildings, and it is essential that this investment be protected through good maintenance practices. In addition, the public expects a clean, well-kept facility, and this is often an ongoing issue for the library staff, already stretched to provide basic services. The public often judges a library based on initial impressions. A clean entryway and neat spaces within the facility are definitely contributors to an enjoyable experience.

The purpose of this article is to provide a basic checklist of routine maintenance, emergency procedures and a recommended schedule for accomplishing the tasks. While some libraries are fortunate to have special staff to provide routine cleaning and major equipment checks, the majority of smaller public libraries in Georgia must handle these items with local staff. One recommended procedure is to develop a policy manual that includes checklists to cover most potential issues.

#### Routine Maintenance

While every system director strives to employ a large, well-trained janitorial staff, the reality is that most libraries don't have the funds to adequately maintain their facilities as well as they would like. A safe and clean facility is the responsibility of all staff. In fact, this is a part of basic customer service that every library user expects. Planning is a key to success. Library administrators should devote as much time to planning for maintenance chores as they do for public services. Identifying key objectives and budgeting for their accomplishment are a part of the



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process. New staff should know that routine maintenance is expected, and this should be a key element of staff orientation and training.

The Sno-Isle Libraries (Sno-Isle Libraries Policy Statement, 2010) has a policy regarding maintenance of library facilities. "Ongoing building maintenance and repair of library facilities are the responsibility of the library. Ongoing expenses will be funded within the annual operating budget." Cheryl Bryan, author of "Managing Facilities for Results" (ALA, 2007), suggests that, "Libraries should have and keep current a policy about building maintenance ... Preventative maintenance can prevent costly and inconvenient facility breakdowns. This is accomplished by scheduled inspections conducted at regular intervals and by systematic scheduling of cleaning, lubrication, repair and replacement of parts of building systems."

In Georgia, public libraries may be owned by counties, cities, boards of education or library boards. The responsibility for upkeep of public library facilities should be clearly defined. Each system should reach a clear understanding with the library's funding agencies about this responsibility. Who will be responsible for custodial care of the interior and exterior, who will handle landscape maintenance, and who will repair plumbing, electrical, heating, cooling, wastewater and mechanical systems? This should be included as a part of the policy statement, a memorandum of understanding and/or a maintenance plan that states frequency and standard of activity.

As part of the planning process, each library system should develop a Maintenance Handbook that includes a

checklist of tasks with general time guidelines for accomplishing those chores. Every staff member should assume ownership of the cleanliness of the building including basic tasks such as replacing paper towels in the restrooms as needed, vacuuming an area after use and emptying trash when needed.

The Maintenance Handbook may include checklists for routine housekeeping tasks such as vacuuming all public areas of the facility, cleaning restrooms and ensuring freshness, filling all dispensers for hand sanitizers, wiping keyboards, replacing paper towels and other daily cleaning efforts. Dusting and cleaning all public surfaces should be a daily occurrence along with emptying trash. The grounds should be inspected, with trash and litter picked up on a regular basis. Wet mopping all hard surfaces should be regularly scheduled. A visual inspection of the building's lighting should include a check for burned-out bulbs and replacements. Additional tasks may include ensuring that all entries and exits are free of debris, moving boxes away from doors and power washing all restrooms.

Annual tasks may involve professional inspection of heating and air conditioning units, boilers and chillers, elevators, computer-driven equipment and sprinkler systems. Fire alarms and other annunciator panels should be checked regularly along with fire extinguishers. All staff should be trained to locate emergency exits and how to use the basic life safety equipment.

Vehicle maintenance is normally preventative in nature. The vehicle's recommended guidelines for oil changes and regular checks of brakes, tire wear and air conditioning fluid should be followed carefully. Routine vehicle maintenance as recommended by the manufacturer is essential to preventing most breakdowns on the highway or future costly replacement of parts. All staff using library-owned vehicles should know how to manage simple procedures including changing a tire and reading any indicator lights.

A sample checklist is appended to this article, compiled from our experience in dealing with mechanical, electrical, safety and cleaning issues over the years. It is by no means complete, and each library has unique needs. It is, however, a guideline for developing a handbook that responds to local needs.

### **Disaster Planning**

Planning and training staff to deal with potential emergencies will enable staff to react effectively when the unexpected happens. Each department or area of the library should know how to react and who to call when a

facility emergency arises. There are several points that should be included in an Emergency Procedures Handbook. First should be the system's policy for dealing with various types of emergencies, including the responsibility for dealing with financial records, the collection, computer networks, and communication with the media. The handbook should include information on who to call for assistance including the local emergency management group, GEMA, FEMA, poison control, utilities (gas, water and electric), emergency contact telephone numbers for staff, a company that can board up windows, and materials recovery offices. A good plan will include steps of action and assigns roles to specific staff members.

While every library usually has a fire escape plan, there are some special circumstances that may require additional assistance. For instance, if a facility has an elevator, it's important to ensure that no one is trapped inside should there be a fire or the power goes out. Special assistance may be necessary in the case of disabled patrons. Library staff should be prepared to assist as needed to get the person to the nearest stairwell or place of safety. Every emergency exit in the building needs to be appropriately illuminated and accessible.

A utility emergency is usually defined as an electrical power failure, gas line break or water main or sewer break. These emergencies require a visual check of all areas of the building followed by a call to the utility responsible for the service. A facility map with cutoff valves should be located in the back area of the building near major utilities. An exterior Knox-Box with maps and keys could be used to ensure emergency personnel have access to the facility after hours.

Other possible disasters a library staff should be trained to recognize are toxic fumes (often present because of broken or leaking waste pipes, mechanical or electrical fires, chemical spills, and carbon monoxide); flooding; fire; weather (tornado and other severe weather); and accident or serious injury. Each type of situation requires different reactions, and these should be outlined in the handbook.

The final category includes training the staff to handle situations such as bomb threat, bioterrorism, assault and hostage taking. In each of these situations, staff should immediately notify the police for assistance. If the library is equipped with an intruder alarm, it should be activated immediately and the library cleared if possible.

An example of a page from the Emergency Procedures Handbook (*Emergency Procedures, Athens Regional Library System, 2007*) might include:

## Assault

- Telephone number for police
- Telephone contacts for appropriate staff, on-duty security guard
- A definition of assault: A violent physical or verbal attack to hurt another
- Signal: May be visual or audible. Press emergency buzzer on desk.

### Steps of Action:

1. In the event of an injury, get outside line and dial 911 immediately; state your name, location and the nature of the emergency.
2. Find quiet place for the victim to sit, preferably in a private office. If the victim cannot be moved, see procedures for serious injury.
3. Contact library security and administration for assistance.
4. Stay with the victim until police arrive, offering what assistance you can.
5. Ask the victim if there is anyone to be called. Assist in making the necessary phone calls.
6. Be aware of the possibility of shock; keep victim warm and quiet.
7. Do not try to question the victim about the incident, but listen if the victim needs to talk.
8. When police arrive, give them your name and make yourself available for a statement if necessary.

An example of a page from the Newton County Library handbook (*Newton County Library Emergency Procedures 2009*) might include:

## Plumbing problem

Any restroom, sink or water fountain disruption of service.

- If fresh water is gushing from a sink or toilet, turn off the water. Under each sink is a cutoff valve (it may be covered by a plastic cap that can be pulled off). On each toilet or urinal, the cutoff valve is covered by a small silver nut. Unscrew the nut and then use a screwdriver to turn the water off.
- If sewer water is flowing from a toilet or drain, call the plumber.
- If a water fountain or sink does not operate or drain properly, call the plumber.

If these methods do not turn off the leaking water that is gushing out, go to the sprinkler room next to the staff restrooms. In the far corner (opposite the sink) is a pipe that runs from the ceiling to the floor. This is the water main. Halfway down the pipe is a blue flat handle valve. The handle should be parallel to the pipe. Turn

	DAILY	WEEKLY	MONTHLY	ANNUALLY
<b>Exterior of the Building</b>				
Parking lot is free of debris	X			
Steps are in good repair & equipped with handrails	X			
Sidewalks are clear of debris	X			
Trash and cigarette butts are removed	X			
Benches are clean and swept	X			
Graffiti is removed immediately	X			
Downed limbs are removed				
Broken windows are replaced	X			
Water leaks are fixed	X			
Flowers, bushes, etc. are growing well		X		
Grass areas are in good condition		X		
Lights are in working order		X		
Landscaping is maintained		X		
Egress and Ingress are well marked		X		
Book return is clean		X		
Flags are in good condition and lighted		X		
Building signage is visible from street		X		
Windows, doors free of sharp edges		X		
Tree limbs, etc. are removed from roof		X		
Handicapped parking is clearly marked			X	
Flag pole is lit and in working order			X	
Gutters are cleaned out				X
Entrance areas are power cleaned				X
Mold and mildew are cleaned off walls				X
<b>Library Entry &amp; Circulation</b>				
Doors open and close securely	X			
Glass is clean	X			
Entry is unencumbered	X			
Floors are clean	X			
Tripping hazards removed	X			
Lights are in working order	X			
Trash is removed	X			
Furniture is returned to proper place	X			
Brochures are stacked in displayer	X			
Circ Desktop is neat and organized	X			
Receipt printers checked	X			
Bulletin board is updated				
Signage is appropriate		X		
Excess signs are removed		X		
Supplies are efficiently stored		X		
Computer wiring is not exposed		X		
Barriers to public are removed		X		
Desk components clearly marked		X		
Walk off mats are cleaned			X	
Automatic doors are checked				X
Emergency lights tested				X
<b>Restrooms</b>				
Lights are in working order	X			
Glass is clean	X			
Toilets, urinals, sinks are cleaned	X			
All stainless steel wiped clean	X			
Trash is emptied regularly	X			
Disinfect all surfaces	X			
Graffiti removed from stall walls	X			
Fixtures are in working order, no leaks		X		
Exhaust vents are working		X		
Toilets and urinals are in working order		X		
Floors are clean, mopped regularly		X		
Soap dispensers are full		X		
Hand dryers are working		X		
Room smells fresh		X		
Ceiling is clean and free of thrown items		X		
Power-washing as needed			X	
Air fresheners refilled			X	
Floor drain traps filled with water				X
Emergency lights tested				X
<b>Children's Area</b>				
Floors are clean; vacuum regularly	X			
Supplies are put away, no hazardous items available	X			
Tripping options are minimized	X			
Book trucks secured	X			
Trash is emptied regularly	X			
Carpet vacuumed	X			
Lights are in working order		X		
Carpet & upholstered furniture inspected for "accidents", cleaned		X		
All surfaces dusted, cleaned regularly		X		
Table tops and carrel tops washed			X	
Check all clocks			X	
Walls & surfaces cleaned & repainted				X

	DAILY	WEEKLY	MONTHLY	ANNUALLY
Chair fabric is vacuumed and cleaned				X
Emergency lights tested				X
<b>Adult Reading Area</b>				
Lights are in working order	X			
Floors are clean; vacuum regularly	X			
Shelves are neat, orderly	X			
Access to equipment is unimpeded	X			
Trash is emptied regularly	X			
Copiers and printers checked for power and paper	X			
Lights are in working order		X		
All surfaces dusted; cleaned regularly		X		
Check all clocks			X	
Walls repainted as needed				X
Ceiling tiles are replaced when needed				X
Upholstery is vacuumed and cleaned				X
Emergency lights tested				X
<b>Computer Spaces</b>				
Lights are in working order	X			
Printers checked, paper loaded	X			
Desktops cleared off	X			
Trash emptied regularly; recycling units provided	X			
Keyboards and other surfaces cleaned		X		
All surfaces dusted, cleaned		X		
Computer screens cleaned		X		
Wiring hazards minimized		X		
Cabling checked			X	
Equipment stored in designated area			X	
CPU units opened and air cleaned			X	
UPS battery inspection			X	
<b>Special Collections</b>				
Lights are in working order	X			
All surfaces are dusted & cleaned	X			
Debris removed quickly	X			
Care in storage of rare materials	X			
Special displays & exhibits are maintained		X		
Carpet and flooring maintained		X		
Equipment is checked regularly		X		
<b>Public Meeting Spaces</b>				
Lights are in working order	X			
Floor is free of debris	X			
Trash is emptied regularly	X			
Disinfect all surfaces	X			
Ceiling tiles are present		X		
Dimming lights, AV, microphones are working		X		
Drinking fountains are in working order		X		
Fountains are free of leaks, corrosion		X		
Tables are free of sharp edges			X	
Tables and chairs are cleaned			X	
Kitchen cabinets are cleaned			X	
AV equipment bulbs are checked			X	
Walls, are clean; repaint as necessary				X
<b>Vehicles</b>				
Review preventative maintenance program for vehicles		X		
Check brakes, tires, coolant, head-lights, turn signals		X		
Inspect washer fluid		X		
Check battery terminals and water level		X		
Clean and vacuum vehicles			X	
Train staff to identify indicator lights			X	
<b>Staff Areas</b>				
All food items removed daily	X			
Trash emptied regularly	X			
Recycling materials removed	X			
No dishes, utensils left in sink	X			
Vacuum area regularly	X			
Floors are free of trip hazards	X			
Emergency lighting available	X			
Proper equipment available	X			
Appropriate signage posted	X			
Sinks cleaned	X			
Floors vacuumed or mopped	X			
Desktops periodically cleaned		X		
Ice maker cleaned out		X		
Lounge tables cleaned		X		
Refrigerator cleaned			X	
Chairs vacuumed and cleaned				X

	DAILY	WEEKLY	MONTHLY	ANNUALLY
<b>General Maintenance</b>				
Emergency exits are clear & identified	X			
Investigate all odors, sounds	X			
Floors free of trip hazards	X			
Review accident procedures, reports and workers comp incidents		X		
Emergency doors not blocked and tested		X		
Storage areas are clean and orderly			X	
Emergency Procedures Posted & reviewed with all staff			X	
Exit light battery back-up working			X	
Clean vinyl/linoleum, concrete			X	
Check HVAC belts and filters			X	
GA Dept of Labor elevator check			X	
Oil level is checked in compressors			X	
Check roof system, gutters, and drains			X	
Regular program of pest control			X	
Designated storage for paint, replacement tiles, cleaning chemicals			X	
Walls, windows & ceilings checked for good condition			X	
Circuit breaker panels are marked and checked for tripped circuit			X	
Test flush all toilets and urinals			X	
Test all sinks for hot and cold water			X	
Test all blinds and shades			X	
Clean copier glass and test machine			X	
Emergency exits are inspected			X	
HVAC filters changed			X	
Pest control sprayed			X	
Fire extinguishers inspected			X	
Alarm system tested				X
Sprinkler system inspected				X
Fire extinguishers recharged				X
Replace worn carpet as necessary				X
Clean carpet in facility				X
Check electrical systems				X
Floors are sealed				X
Batteries replaced in back up systems				X
Boiler is inspected				X
Spring and Fall inspection of HVAC				X
Inspect and test hot water heaters				X
All windows washed				X
Fire alarm inspection				X

the main water supply valve off by pulling the handle down so it is perpendicular to the pipe. This should turn off all water to the building.

### Conclusion

Every library should be equipped with some basic emergency materials such as plastic sheeting to cover sections of the collection, packaging tape, gloves, first aid kit, flashlights and disposable digital cameras. These essentials should be periodically updated and batteries checked but are necessary elements. Many articles have been written about materials preservation, which won't be repeated here. However, quick action is critical. Maintaining a list of essential phone numbers as a part of the emergency kit will help in critical situations. ►►

*Kathryn Ames is director of the Athens Regional Library System. Greg Heid is director of the Newton County Library System.*

### Resources:

- Athens Regional Library System. *Emergency Procedures*. 2007.
- Bryan, Cheryl. *Managing Facilities for Results*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2007.
- Newton County Library *Emergency Procedures*. 2009
- Sno-Isle Libraries. [www.sno-isle.org](http://www.sno-isle.org). Accessed 10/22/2010.