

Chapter 7: Emergency Planning and Security

An institution demonstrates preservation awareness and well-integrated conservation policies through an emergency preparedness and response plan that is regularly reviewed and updated by conservation professionals and other appropriate staff.

–*Position Paper on Conservation and Preservation in Collecting Institutions*, American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 2002

An organization that practices responsible stewardship maintains and enforces a well-developed Disaster Plan.

–*Standards and Practices for Historic Site Administration*, Tri-State Coalition for Historic Places, 2000

Archivists protect all documentary materials for which they are responsible and guard them against defacement, physical damage, deterioration, and theft.

–*Code of Ethics for Archivists*, Society for American Archivists, 2005

In fall 2005, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita brought renewed attention to the critical need for emergency planning at all levels of community life. For collecting institutions, the damage sustained by historic sites, libraries, archives, and museums on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi and Louisiana was a reminder of the importance of protecting collections from natural disasters. In this context, it is particularly alarming that the Heritage Health Index finds that 80% of U.S. collecting institutions do not have a written emergency/disaster plan that includes collections with staff trained to carry it out. Figure 7.1 shows this statistic by institutional type—historical societies are least likely to have a plan with trained staff, and archives are more likely to have these preventive measures in place.

The Heritage Health Index survey asked four questions to gauge the risk to collections of swift and catastrophic loss. Natural causes constitute just a portion of the types of disasters that could damage a collection; floods can result from burst pipes or malfunctioning sprinkler systems, and a fire or hostile act could put collections in danger. With 80% of institutions not having proper planning to protect their collections from emergencies or disasters, 2.6 billion items are at risk. Figure 7.2 illustrates that libraries without emergency plans hold most of these items, followed by museums, archaeological repositories/scientific research collections, archives, and historical societies. Viewed by type of collections, the lack of disaster preparedness puts about half of each type of collection items at risk for damage or

Figure 7.1 Institutions with No Emergency Plan with Staff Trained to Carry It Out

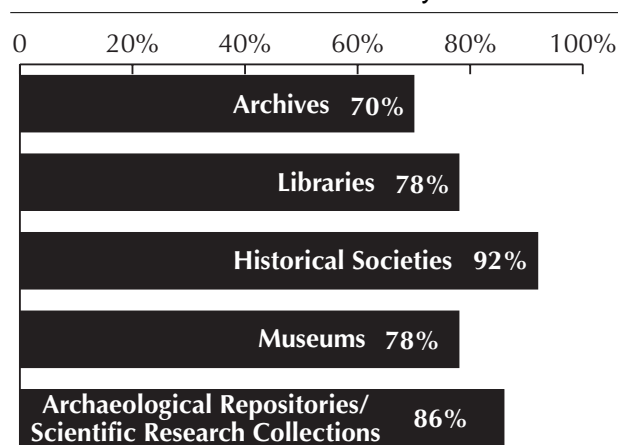
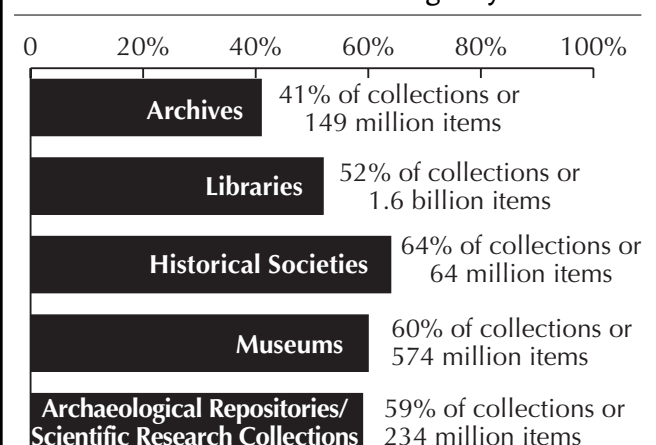


Fig. 7.2 Collections at Risk Because Institutions Do Not Have Emergency Plans



loss; an exception is that 72% of historical and ethnographic collection items are not covered by emergency planning.

The finding that 80% of U.S. collecting institutions do not have a written emergency/disaster plan that includes collections and staff trained to carry it out was determined from the responses to two questions. Question D4 “Does your institution have a written emergency/disaster plan that includes the collections?” was deliberately worded. Qualifying that the plan is “written” demonstrates that it has been carefully considered and codified as institutional policy. The wording “that includes collections” is also significant. Some institutions do have emergency plans in place for the safety of staff and visitors, and while that is paramount in the event of an emergency, planning for the protection of the collection is an essential component of responsible stewardship.

Answer choices to D4 included “yes,” “yes, but it is not up-to-date,” “no, but one is being developed,” “no,” and “don’t know.” In analyzing the responses to this question, Heritage Preservation considered “yes,” and “yes, but it is not up-to-date” as affirmative responses. While an up-to-date plan is important in an emergency, an old plan is better than no plan at all. Likewise, the response “no, but one is being developed” was included with the “no” responses, because a plan in development is not adequate protection should disaster strike. “Don’t know” was also included with “no” because all staff should be aware of the

existence of a plan. The results to this question are:

Yes	22%
Yes, but it is not up-to-date	11%
No, but one is being developed	13%
No	50%
Don’t know	5%

According to the analysis parameters, 68% do not have an emergency/disaster plan that includes collections.

An essential aspect of emergency/disaster preparedness is that staff be trained to carry out the plan. A follow-up question for respondents with written emergency/disaster plans that include collections asked, “Is your staff trained to carry it out?” The responses are:

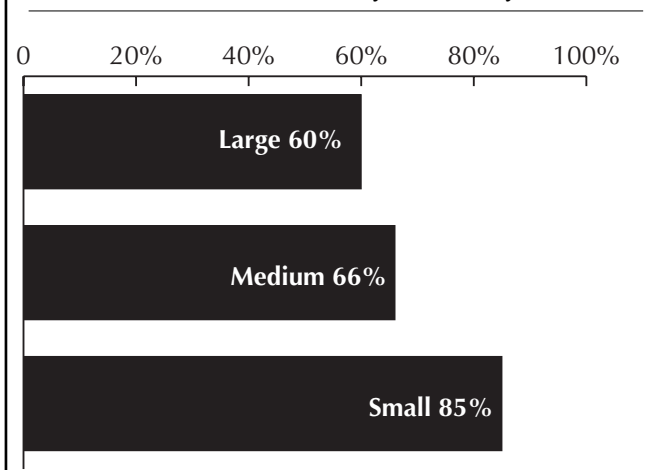
Yes	56%
No	29%
Don’t know	14%

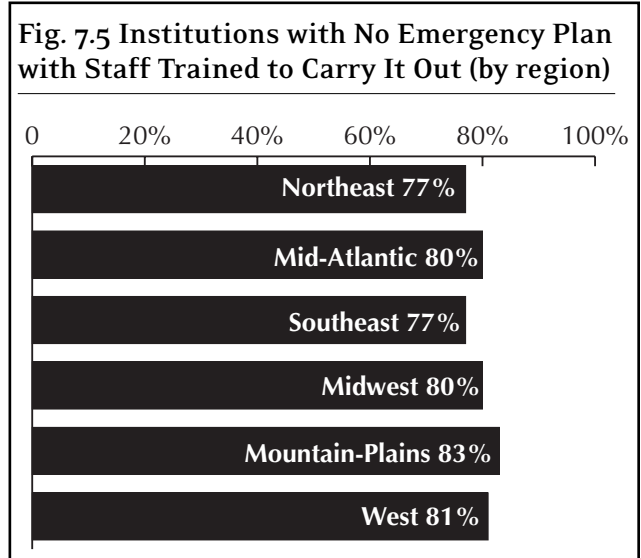
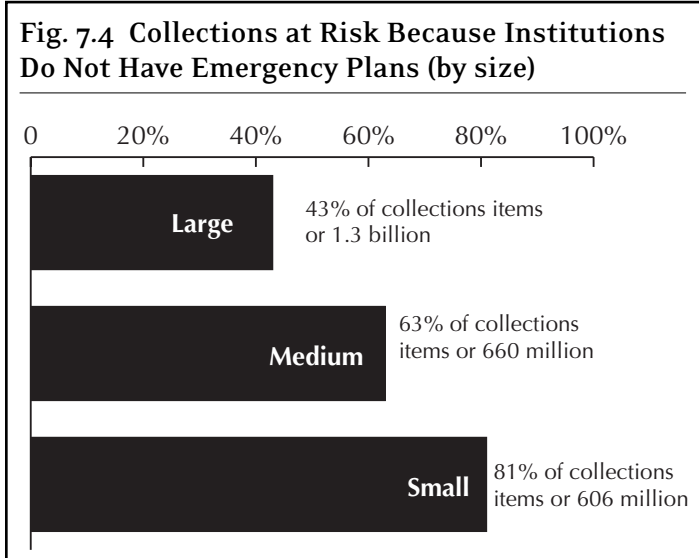
Heritage Preservation considered the high percentage of “don’t know” responses to indicate that staff is not trained.

Because a written plan without staff trained to carry it out is likely to be ineffective, Heritage Preservation staff and the advisers who reviewed the survey data concluded that understanding the actual level of preparedness by U.S. collecting institutions required cross-tabulating the responses to the two questions. The cross-tabulated result is that 80% of institutions do not have an emergency plan with staff trained to carry it out.

This finding correlates to size (figure 7.3). Considered together, 60% of large institutions have no plan with trained staff; of these, archaeological repositories/scientific research collections have the highest percentage without planning at 76%, followed by libraries at 63%. Emergency planning with staff training is lacking at 59% of large museums. Historical societies and archives are below the average of 60%, with 44% and 43% respectively. Mid-sized institutions are all close to the 66% average for this group, except for archaeological repositories/scientific research collections, with 86% having no emergency plan with staff trained to carry it out. Of the small institutions, historical societies are

Fig. 7.3 Institutions with No Emergency Plan with Staff Trained to Carry It Out (by size)





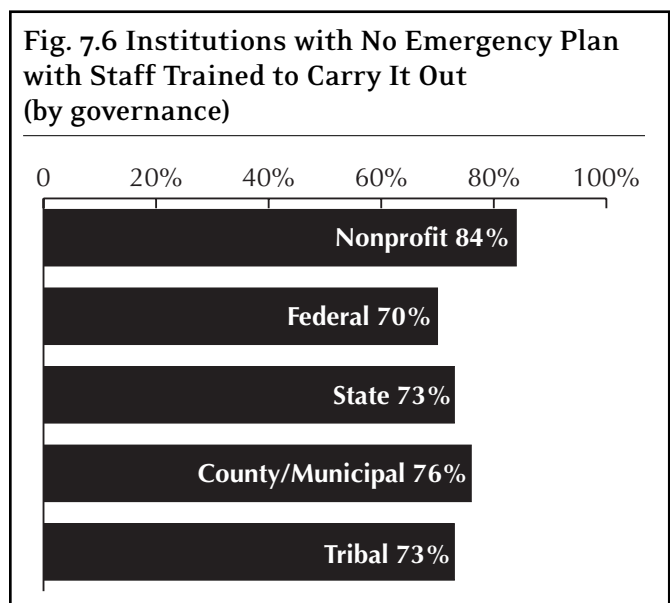
least likely to have a plan with staff trained (94%), followed by archaeological repositories/scientific research collections at 88%. Archives, libraries, and museums are at about the 85% average for small institutions.

As shown in figure 7.4, large institutions without emergency plans and staff trained to carry them out put the largest amount of collections at risk: 43% of collections held at large institutions or 1.3 billion items. Medium-sized and small institutions hold the remaining approximately 1.3 billion items at risk because they are not covered by an emergency plan and trained staff.

Institutions in the Northeast and Southeast are only slightly more likely to have adequate emergency planning in place (figure 7.5), with other regions close to the 80% national average. Given the margin of error of between +/- 3% and +/- 4%, the differences between regions are slight. Viewing the statistic by governance (figure 7.6), institutions under federal, state, and tribal governments are more likely to have emergency planning in place than nonprofit institutions.

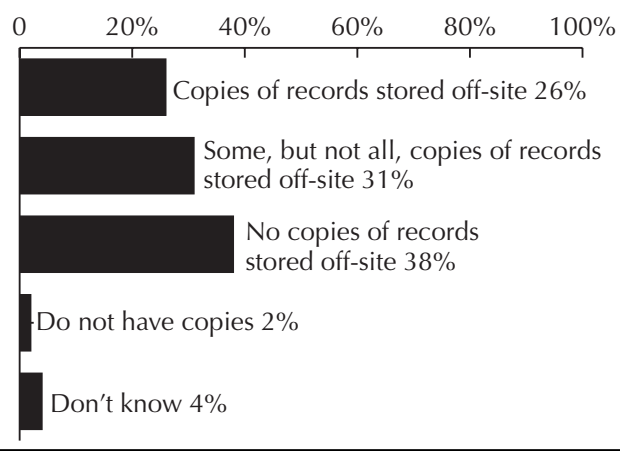
Findings from the Heritage Preservation report *Cataclysm and Challenge: Impact of September 11, 2001, on Our Nation's Cultural Heritage* underscored the importance of having collections records stored off-site. The report states, "Of significant concern, the survey found more than half (53 percent) of the respondents kept no off-site

record of their inventory. Had the destruction of September 11 spread more widely, many collecting institutions would have been left with no complete record of what had been lost."¹ Based on this finding from *Cataclysm and Challenge*, the Heritage Health Index survey included a question to determine how many institutions would be similarly at risk should disaster strike. The question asked, "Are copies of vital collections records stored off-site?" and gave examples of "inventory, catalog, insurance policies," but otherwise allowed institutions to define what "vital" meant. Figure 7.7 shows that only 26% are sufficiently prepared



1. Heritage Preservation, *Cataclysm and Challenge: Impact of September 11, 2001, on Our Nation's Cultural Heritage*, 2002, 18.

Fig. 7.7 Institutions with Copies of Vital Collection Records Stored Off-site



with copies of all vital records stored off-site; 31% have some records off-site, and 44% are unprepared (the 2% with no collections records at all and 4% that responded “don’t know” can be logically added to the 38% “no” responses).

Although the results correspond to size (figure 7.8), the differences between large and small institutions are not dramatic; the largest gap between the two is 11% in the “no” response. When considering responses to “no collections records stored off-site” by governance (figure 7.9), federal institutions have the lowest percentage at 28%, compared to the national average of 38%, and institutions under tribal governance have the highest at 48%. By type of institution, 52% of

archaeological repositories/scientific research collections have no collections records stored off-site, followed by 45% of science museums/zoos/botanical gardens. At 38%, independent research libraries are most likely to have all their vital collections records stored off-site.

Another catastrophic risk to collections is theft or vandalism. Heritage Health Index survey question D7 asked, “Do you have adequate security systems to help prevent theft or vandalism of collections?” Since the level and sophistication of security systems can vary depending on the size and type of institutions and the collections, “adequate” was left to the judgment of the responding institution. The type of examples given to demonstrate the range of types of security included security guard, staff observation, and intrusion detection. The Heritage Health Index finds that 44% of collecting institutions deem their security systems to be adequate, leaving 56% without adequate protection (figure 7.10). This data by type of institution shows that libraries (34%) and archaeological repositories/scientific research collections (33%) are most likely to have inadequate or no security systems. Art museums are most likely to have adequate security in all areas (59%), followed by history museums/historic sites/other museums (50%). Data from this question relates to size, with 29% of small institutions having inadequate or no security systems, compared with only 12% of large institutions and

Fig. 7.8 Institutions with Copies of Vital Collections Records Stored Off-site (by size)

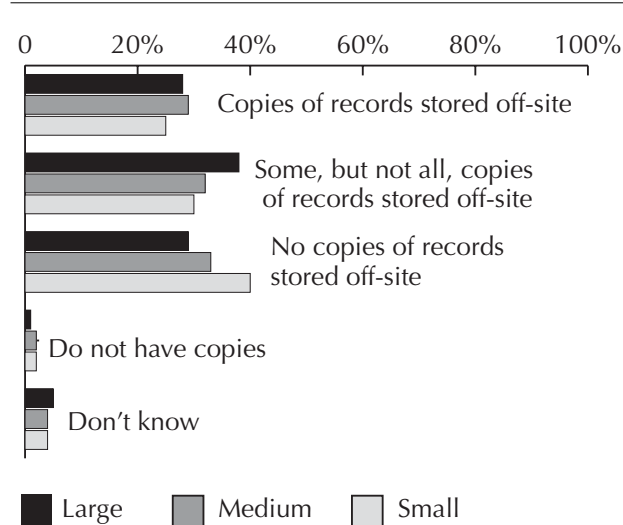
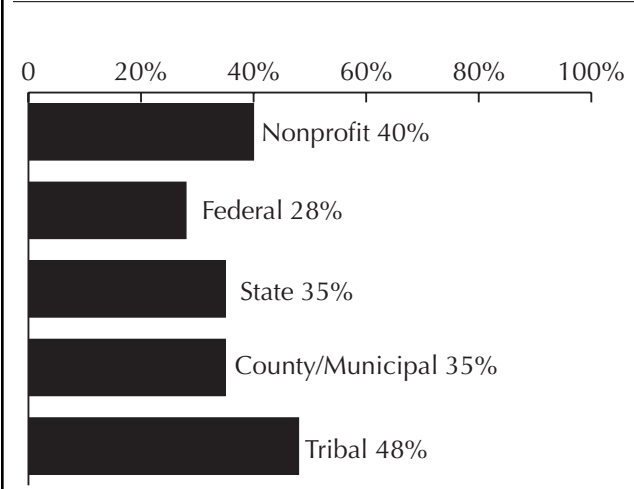
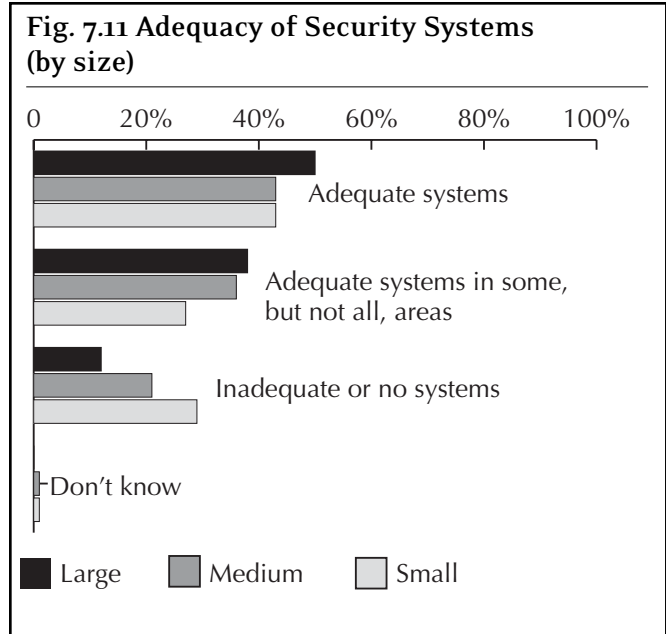
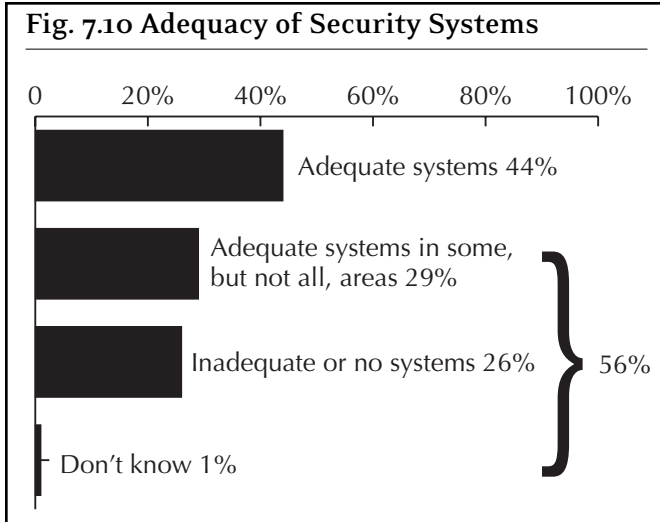


Fig. 7.9 Institutions with No Copies of Vital Collections Records Stored Off-site (by governance)

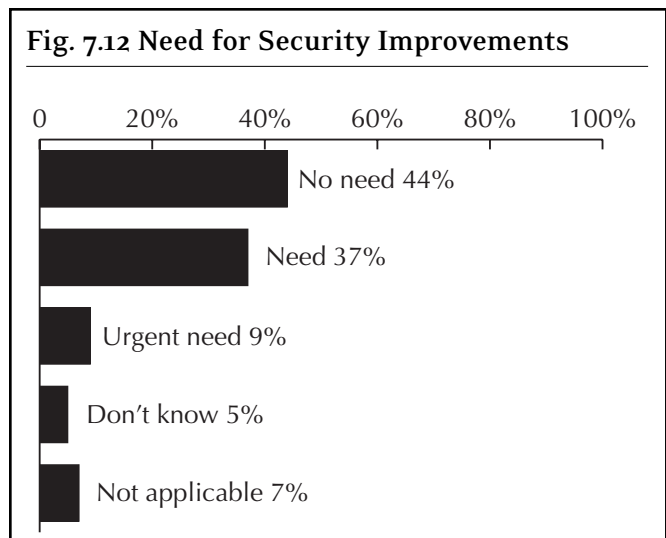




21% of medium-sized institutions (figure 7.11).

In question D12, which asked institutions the urgency of preservation/conservation needs, 9% cited an urgent need for security (figure 7.12), ranking below five other factors (figure 5.12, p. 54). Combining “some need” and “urgent need,” 45% of institutions need security improvements; this is the lowest ranking need, just below preservation of digital collections and integrated pest management, both at 46%.

Vandalism was cited as the cause of significant damage at 1% of institutions and of some damage at 22% of institutions. It was the least frequent cause of significant and some damage, after fire at 0.4% and 3% respectively. However, of all causes of damage listed, fire is most likely to result in an immediate and a total loss to the object.



Recommendation

Every collecting institution must develop an emergency plan to protect its collections and train staff to carry it out.