



National Archives News

November

Vol. 2 No. 10/11

(The Newsletter of the Archives and Records Management Unit)



Although we are almost out of the hurricane season and have had few reported serious incidences of flood damage after Omar, the threat of water damage to records is ever present.

One records store flooded, luckily, there were no records on the floor and therefore no damage was caused. However, quite apart from Omar, recently a burst water pipe in one department played havoc with records which were stored on the floor. Some remedial efforts were put into action and the records are on the road to recovery.

Records Management

“The Disaster Management Tips for Records” is a very useful brochure which every Records Office should have. It is available from the Archives and RM Unit.

- The brochure gives guidelines on salvaging water damaged documents and
- It explains basic drying techniques such as ‘air- drying.

“The Emergency Plan for Records” is another useful document
Here is an excerpt taken from it:

In the event of flooding the following steps should be taken:

- ✚ Documents or records should be removed from lower shelves to a higher location and wherever possible, have documents removed from the room.
- ✚ Documents should be covered with plastic immediately, in the case of a broken pipe.
- ✚ In case of flooding, water should be pumped out immediately.
- ✚ In case of broken pipe(s) the water should be turned off and the pipes repaired.

Recovery Efforts

- ✚ Act quickly.
- ✚ Assess the extent of the damage.
- ✚ Consult the Archivist and Conservator and work closely with him or her.
- ✚ Prioritize the damaged documents with regards to restoration.
- ✚ Damaged documents should be removed immediately and placed in an open area to dry.
- ✚ Wherever possible freeze-dry the documents in 3-10 hours. Depending on the extent of the damage this may be the only safest way to restore the documents.
- ✚ On completion of the disaster recovery, plastic should be removed, and documents

returned to shelves and replaced in new containers or boxes.

- ✚ If a freeze dryer is unavailable, use commercial fans to dry the documents.
- ✚ Blotting paper can also be used between pages to absorb moisture.
- ✚ When packing the wet documents, be extremely careful in handling them. They would be very fragile.
- ✚ Pack the wet documents in plastic crates; fill the crates up to three quarters and then mark with identification labels.
- ✚ Single pages should not be separated; interleave every two inches of pages with freezer paper.
- ✚ Water colours, maps and manuscripts with soluble media should not be blotted.
- ✚ Do not open or close wet books or remove wet book covers.
- ✚ If the flood water is dirty; wash the books before freezing.
- ✚ Do not wash open books. Books should be washed closed, in tubs of running water and dabbed. Do not rub.
- ✚ Pack books with the spine down.
- ✚ Leather, parchment and vellum bindings are immediate priority because they distort and disintegrate in water.
- ✚ After all the methods of salvaging have been completed and books and documents dried, repairing of documents and rebinding of books can take place.

Should mould and mildew occur because of any type of flooding or other conditions, take the following steps:

- ✚ Wear a filter respirator.
- ✚ Mould kills, it is toxic therefore all cleaning of books or documents with mould should be done outside in the open air and not in doors.
- ✚ Thymol should not be used in cleaning mould from documents. It has been found to be a health hazard.
- ✚ Storage conditions should be checked and corrected to prevent further mould outbreak. Ensure that the temperature and humidity are at the right level as mould thrives on dampness and still air.

Continuing Education

During the month of October the Government Archivist, Mr. Christopher Varlack, gave an introductory Records Management (RM) talk to Senior Civil servants as part of the Training Division's Civil Servants Induction Programme. During his half hour presentation, Mr. Varlack outlined basic RM concepts and stressed that all Civil Servants can help enhance the quality of their professional and personal lives by enhancing their RM knowledge base.

He also spoke at the Tortola Ladies' Club Luncheon on the importance of archives in society. In addition to outlining a brief history of the Archives, the GA updated the group on current initiatives such as the Deputy Governor's History Research Awards.

Archives Records Management Unit (ARMU) staff members have also responded to SOS queries and requests from several departments for assistance with RM problems and procedures.

Remedial seminars, discussions and mini-workshops with records personnel in crisis situations is a routine service provided as requested and as time allows.

Outreach: Community participation

Governor's office augments collection

Our picture collection has been augmented by the official photos of the Governor's Office. His Excellency the Governor has kindly agreed to lend us his office's pictures for scanning so that they can be made available to a greater number of the persons, for reference, study and educational purposes.

We appeal to members of the public, individuals and organizations to lend us pictures for scanning in order to build up our collection. We reiterate that it is from such collections, that researchers will glean the facts to write the social history of this country both now and in the future. So, don't let your history and that of the Virgin Islands fade away. Share them with the Archives Unit.



"Expecting the Unexpected: Disaster Preparedness Strategies for small Business" is an excellent brochure that can be downloaded at: [www.officedepot.com/get prepared](http://www.officedepot.com/get_prepared).

History Awards

The results of the Deputy Governor's History Research Awards submissions will be announced soon. The theme this year is: "Historical Sites in the Virgin Islands"

The purpose of the DG's History Research Awards Programme is to promote, encourage and recognise local history research in the Virgin Islands. Participants are invited to list historical sites in a particular locality and to do an in-depth research study on one of the sites. Sites may be on land or at sea, and may cover any subject or period. Application forms and guidelines are available from the Help Desk, DGO and the Archives Unit., Tele: 468-3701 ext. 2365, 3044 or 2562.

Information Industry News

Should citizens pay to see records?

At the same time the city of Missoula is taking steps to make more public records more easily available in the future, some citizens are encountering a barrier to seeing electronic records from the past. Blackler said he understands that it takes time to pull together materials for the public, but it isn't every citizen who can foot the bill. And from his perspective, the cost essentially removes the documents from the public realm. After learning the cost, just one person so far has agreed to pay, according to city officials.

"I think the city should make it extremely easy for people to get these records," Blackler said.

Laura Howe wanted to see city e-mail exchanges during meetings about two developments in her neighborhood. In an e-mail from the city, she learned officials did not know if the records were available. If they were, though, she would have to pay for 20 hours of research at \$10 an hour.

"Well, do you have the information? Or not?" Howe said. "It just seemed really discombobulated."

Howe said she understands that public agencies function on limited resources. But the bill

seemed too high and the research time inordinate to fulfill her narrow request.

"I understand that public requests take time, but I thought it was excessive," Howe said.

By law, however, the city is allowed to recoup reasonable costs of providing documents to the public. The city provides citizens half an hour of research time at no cost, and thereafter charges \$10 an hour, Rehbein said.

She said people have made requests that require researching backup tapes, which involves many staff hours at a time when the information technology department is short staffed. So when people have made extensive requests, the city has asked for a deposit up front of half the estimated cost.

Private rights?

Chief Administrative Officer Bruce Bender said providing e-mail records is complicated by legal ramifications as well.

"The difficult ones are those individual e-mails," Bender said.

He said a lot of his electronic correspondence includes private medical information from firefighters out on medical calls, or even information about criminal investigations before they result in charges. So the city needs to review communications before releasing them to the public to ensure it's not violating privacy rights, he said.

"It's very, very burdensome," Bender said of fulfilling requests for electronic records.

But he said the city is clarifying its processes. City Attorney Jim Nugent has long told elected ward representatives to enter into the public record information that influences their decisions, in particular in areas of land use. In some cases, that means a council member announces during a public meeting a grocery store encounter with a constituent, for example, Rehbein said.

And to keep the record straight, city officials said councilors also must record pertinent ideas coming to them through cyberspace. They can continue to make announcements at public meetings, where staff members record minutes later available online. They also can forward e-mails to all council members, as the city has considered messages sent to all members, or "group," part of its permanent public record already available at City Hall (and soon posted on the city Web site).

(Keila Szpaller: The Missoulian, Records and Records and Archives in the News)

Cayman Islands Freedom of Information Act

A 16-member select committee of public and private sector representatives is in the process of drafting regulations for the Cayman Islands Freedom of Information Law. The A US open records expert who visited the Cayman Islands recently said the country has taken many positive steps towards enacting a Freedom of Information law.

But Laura Neuman of the Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia warned that the Islands aren't all the way there yet.

"Increasingly, we're seeing a problem in the actual use of these (FOI) laws after they've been passed," Ms Neuman said. "Implementation is the greatest challenge to government."

Cayman's Freedom of Information Law, which was passed by the Legislative Assembly in September, is not scheduled to take effect until January or February of 2009. Ms Neuman said in several countries in the Caribbean and Latin American region, the Carter Center has observed that the passage of FOI laws isn't being followed up by enforcement.

"Panama is a perfect example," Ms Neuman said. "Once the law was passed they patted themselves on the back and didn't pay attention to the regulations. What was given with one hand in a great law was taken away with the regulations."

"For example, they fought very hard for what I believe is an international norm, that if you ask for information...you don't have to give a reason. Then in the regulations it added a provision that said you had to have an interest in that information in order to get it."

A 16-member select committee of public and private sector representatives is in the process of drafting regulations for the Cayman Islands Freedom of Information Law.

The regulations are expected to include the cost of obtaining government information, and will define the role of information managers that oversee the operation of the FOI Law in each government agency.

The regulations will also define what the crucial legal test of public interest will be in regard to whether certain records should be released or withheld.

People are encouraged to e-mail suggestions to the FOI coordinator's office.

Ms Neuman also noted that Cayman would soon select an independent information commissioner whose job will include ruling on whether government information should be made public in cases where the release of those records are disputed by the agency that holds them.

Under the law passed in Legislative Assembly, the appointment of an information commissioner is at the sole discretion of the Cayman Islands Governor, who is an appointed official himself.

Comparing Cayman FOI

In general, Ms Neuman gave good reviews to the Freedom of Information Law passed by the Legislature when comparing it to similar laws used around the world.

“This law is better than the US Freedom of Information Act,” she said, noting the US FOIA legislation only covers the executive branch of the government, not the judicial or legislative. She said the US federal government routinely allows its agencies to get far behind on requests for information, and has not updated its open records laws in some 40 years. ..

She said lawmakers in the UK and Ireland had recently voted to increase fees on Freedom of Information requests, which had sharply decreased the overall number of applications for information.

In the Caribbean and Latin American region, 25 countries have either laws or constitutional provisions that guarantee the public’s right to access information. Three other countries do so by executive decree.

Most of those laws have been passed within the last 10 to 15 years.

(RAIN - Records and Archives in the News)

Quote for Today

“...40 percent of small U.S businesses admit that they are not prepared for a disaster and one-third said they have no plans to prepare. (Info Management, Sept-October 2008)

Friends of the Archives

The objective of the Friends is to provide support as required to the National Archives. The Friends meet monthly on the 2nd Wednesday at 4.30.pm. Please become involved today!

National Archives and Records Management Unit
Deputy Governor’s Office
Upstairs Burhym Building
49 de Castro Street, Road Town, Tortola
Virgin Islands VG 1110
Tele: 1 284 468 2365; Fax 468 2582
www.dgo.gov.vg

