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**Records Management and Disaster Planning**  
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Integrating records management practices and principles into disaster planning and recovery is constantly overlooked, oversimplified, or overcomplicated. I chose this topic for my LBSC 682 presentation because of an ARMA International article I read titled, “Think Cloud, Re-Think Disaster Recovery.” While this article was a contextual argument for cloud storage, I decided to focus my presentation on overall disaster planning and recovery.

It was difficult, at first, to decide how much information I wanted to include in the 15-minute presentation. Because there have been many natural disasters in the last 10 years, there are numerous websites offering advice on how to minimize records loss. A large number of these websites are businesses offering records recovery services, such as Iron Mountain and IT consultant companies. After reading a lot of information with a lot of data, recovery steps, and sample disaster plans, I needed to reassess my research strategy. Instead of pulling a lot of information from many different sources, I decided to use the National Archives disaster recovery and planning strategies as my main source, since they are the authority on records management. This was a great decision, because the NARA website led me to other sources that offered simpler, more authoritative information on records management and disaster planning/recovery. NARA had enough information to fill a 15-minute presentation, but there is other information I would like to share. This information is especially important for those in the information profession because it is all well and good to spend resources appraising,

accessioning, and storing records, archival materials, rare books, etc., but if we do not plan for events out of our control, then all that work will be for naught.

One of the main pieces that I did not get to elaborate on in my presentation was the idea of a “Vital Records Plan,” or noting vital records that are necessary for business continuity after the disaster. For businesses, these vital records might include emergency-operating records, customer records, insurance policies, vendor lists, and documents that outline financial and legal rights (NARA, 1999; Eha, 2013). Examples of vital records are scarce and vague, because it changes from business to business, from individual to individual. Even NARA can’t be specific about what types of records should be designated “vital,” as they say, “Agencies must exercise caution in designating records as vital and in conducting the vital records inventory. A review of the available literature suggests that from 1 to 7 percent of an agency's records may be vital records....Agencies must make difficult and judicious decisions in this regard” (NARA, 1999). Once vital records are designated, they also need to be stored in multiple electronic and hard-copy locations, with data back-ups performed on a consistent schedule. Additionally, an inventory which lists these vital records, their storage locations, and back-up schedules also needs to be on-hand. So much planning needs to go into ensuring these vital records will be readily available when a disaster hits; these crucial steps will ensure that businesses (or individuals) don’t become one of the statistics I presented (i.e., 25% of small businesses never reopen after a major disaster due, in part, to loss of vital business records [Institute for Business and Home Safety, 2012]).

On that note, I did not include a lot of specific information in my presentation on how to recover damaged or lost records. The reason for that is: most companies and agencies outsource the recovery process to a specialist to ensure that the correct recovery steps are followed.

However, I did list a number of resources individuals or businesses without the budget for a recovery company can follow to recover damaged records. This includes the very helpful Emergency Response and Salvage smartphone application, which lists steps for recovery of records by material. For example, the “Paper” icon has a short list of steps for the recovery of books and papers, “freezing” being a key step in recovering a large quantity of material (Heritage Preservation, 2012). On the other hand, once records are lost, it can be much more difficult to replace the information or discover workarounds. After Hurricane Sandy, FEMA provided information on how to order replacements of government records (e.g., social security cards, tax returns, car titles, birth certificates, etc.) and advice on who to call for lost insurance and financial records (FEMA, 2013). It is unfortunate that this information was posted in response to Hurricane Sandy, and only posted on their blog.

I did not include a lot of information from FEMA in my presentation because I wanted to focus on NARA’s resources, as they are the authority on records management. FEMA does provide a lot of disaster preparedness and recovery literature on their website for the general public, but it is mostly focused on facility and human safety. Their records-specific information is scattered, reactionary (i.e., recovery strategies specific to recent disasters), outdated, or points to NARA’s website. While I understand why FEMA focuses on facility and human safety, I think they should integrate NARA’s records management planning and recovery strategies into the general literature they disseminate.

The issue of scattered, hard-to-find or read information is something I encountered a lot during my research. Agencies like FEMA have learned from past disasters that information on disaster preparedness and recovery needs to be disseminated in interesting and easy to understand ways (e.g., Ready.gov), and NARA really needs to follow suit. While it would be

ideal for government agencies to integrate NARA's steps for disaster planning and recovery into their existing literature, it is more likely that they will just point people to NARA's Instructional Guide (NARA, 1999). The conclusion I came to after this presentation is that NARA needs to work with agencies, like FEMA, who are skilled in simplifying complicated information for the general public to update their records mitigation and recovery guide so it is easier to navigate. While the guide is aimed at government agency workers, it still needs to be transferred to a format that is easier to follow, especially as people are in a higher state of stress and anxiety immediately after a disaster.

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