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MIRIAM B. KAHN

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# Disaster Response and Planning for Libraries



THIRD EDITION

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# DISASTER RESPONSE AND PLANNING FOR LIBRARIES

THIRD EDITION

*Miriam B. Kahn*

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION  
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**Miriam B. Kahn**, founder of MBK Consulting, helps libraries, archives, corporations, and cultural institutions plan for, recover from, and prevent disasters that interrupt services. Since 1989, she has worked in the field of preservation, consulted on disaster response, and offered hands-on assistance during disasters. She is the author of *Disaster Response and Planning for Libraries*, second edition, and *Protecting Your Library's Electronic Resources* (both published by ALA Editions). She is a popular presenter and teacher, offering courses at Kent State University's Graduate School for Library and Information Science and throughout the Midwest. She holds an MLS from Queens College, CUNY, and a PhD from Kent State University.

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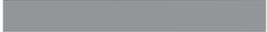
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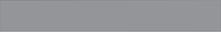
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## Preface

THIS IS THE THIRD TIME I HAVE REVISED THIS BOOK IN AN EFFORT TO HELP librarians, archivists and museum curators deal with disasters, large and small. Since 2002, libraries, archives, historical societies, museums, record centers, court-houses, and all types of businesses and innumerable individuals have dealt with disasters. Time after time, we realize that disasters come in all shapes and sizes, from Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma in 2004–2005 and Hurricane Irene in 2011 to tsunamis in Asia in 2006 and 2011, from the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile in 2010 and on the east coast of North America in the summer of 2011 to the collapse of the archives in Cologne in 2009. In the past ten years, rivers flooded, dams broke, roofs collapsed, fires erupted—disasters too numerous to mention here. Still, libraries, archives, historical societies, museums, and other cultural institutions need this basic book on disaster response to help respond to and plan for the inevitable crisis that is too large for a mop or wet vac.

There is an increased awareness that cultural institutions need a disaster response plan that includes physical and virtual collections, services, administration, and cash flow. Disaster response plans must include advice for dealing with computers, individuals, and their families. The focus of this book continues to emphasize restoration of services to our patrons. We must think beyond the standard bricks and mortar of our buildings to the people and organizations we serve. We must respond to disasters quickly and efficiently, helping others regain some semblance of their previous lives, reconnect with families and jobs, and get back on their feet. That's too large a task for this book, well beyond what cultural institutions do, yet our services are now intertwined with the lives of our patrons.

We must respond quickly and efficiently to restore services. That is the focus of this book. To help cultural institutions respond to and recover from disasters, to plan and prepare for disruption of services and dislocation from their normal routines.

Large and small, public and private, all types of institutions and businesses need to plan for disasters. Disasters come whether or not we are prepared.

Changes since the last edition:

- The field of disaster response is international. We hear about natural and man-made disasters as they occur and respond with physical and financial assistance as quickly as possible. The news keeps all of us informed almost instantaneously, especially when disasters strike. Conservators and preservation professionals travel to

disaster sites, providing information and assistance aimed at restoring access to collections in cultural institutions.

- Social networking is ubiquitous, so we need to consider the implications for communications and public relations. Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, wikis, and blogs are everywhere. They seem to spring up instantaneously when a disaster occurs. Cell phones and digital cameras connect us seamlessly with one another and the world around us, bringing voices and images of disasters to the institution and to the public. We must plan how to limit unofficial information about disasters, because our staff members will disseminate news with or without our permission and oversight.
- Grief counseling is now an integral part of any disaster response plan, no matter what the type of disaster or crisis. Although this topic is beyond the scope of this publication, it is necessary to consider how and when your institution will provide grief counseling. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, institutions must provide counseling to staff members to help them cope with the stress.
- Mission statements and collection development policies are essential guidelines for prioritizing the recovery of damaged materials. They are even more important now that so many of our resources are electronic and digital. The rate of recovery and the order of recovery of services and materials, both print and electronic, depends upon the patron base and the scope of the disaster, what is affected, the type of resources, and the needs of your organization.
- Preparedness serves two purposes: prevention of the disaster in the first place, and preservation and security of collections during and after the disaster.

Each section of this book pertains to all types of cultural institutions, from one-person programs to complex institutions with hierarchical management and administration; from one room to multiple buildings or campuses; from physical objects to digital or virtual. Use the parts of this book that pertain to the size of your institution, and adapt the rest to meet the crisis you face. This publication continues to emphasize the recovery of physical objects, while discussing the importance of backup and remote sites for data and electronic resources.

The events of September 11, 2001, continue to echo in my mind. It is a date and event that changed disaster response forever. The events of that day reinforced the need for each and every business, cultural institution, organization, and government agency to plan for disasters. Since then, disaster response and all its related fields are more visible and more important to all of us. Heightened awareness of security issues, contingency plans, disaster response plans, and many other buzzwords are in the news and professional literature of almost every industry. In the wake of those attacks and of subsequent terrorist scares and natural and man-made disasters, the revision of this book is important. Even so, the primary focus of this publication is still damage to tangible collections in libraries and archives, historical societies and museums. In the light of past events, library disaster response plans must be integrated into disaster response and emergency plans of cultural institutions and communities at large.

Disaster response and emergency plans are integral to the survival of universities, museums, cities, counties, and states. Each crisis reminds us that preparing for small disasters is just as important as planning for the worst, or the unforeseen. Planning for disaster is an attempt to minimize the loss of information to clientele and decrease the loss of access to and closure of collections. Without planning, the chances of survival of a business, information center, library, archives, or museum are next to impossible. Some planning will ensure that part or all of the institution will survive to rebuild itself in a new and stronger manner.

Disasters, emergencies, and crises can occur in many forms, from fire, water, tornado, and loss of power and phones to the destruction of buildings and collections. Disasters occur when we lose a key employee, discover the theft of rare items in our collections, and deal with disruptive patrons. The disaster response team responds to each disaster taking into account its scope and circumstances. Preparation is key for a successful recovery.

While this publication addresses only physical disasters, keep in mind that many other events are disastrous for your institution, including bomb threats, major thefts, and disruptive patrons.

This publication is designed to help libraries and archives, historical societies, record centers, and museums respond to and recover from disasters. The materials and suggestions will assist in the design of disaster response plans. Adapt the plans and procedures to your institution's needs.

The plans and procedures in this publication are generic for all types of cultural institutions and organizations. If you place this book on the shelf without taking the time to modify its procedures to your institution's needs, you did not write a disaster response plan for your own organization. In the worst-case scenario, there are sections designed to be used as situations warrant. Moreover, designing and completing any plan do not guarantee that your institution will survive a disaster. It is merely one step in considering all the risks and preventing them. Planning for disasters will

accomplish two things: increase the chances for you and your library to survive a disaster and decrease the impact afterward.

Store copies of the disaster response plan and computer backup data off-site at home, in record storage centers, or in banks. Place digital copies on remote servers and in digital repositories. Keep at least one hard copy of the plan in each department and building. Update the plan whenever there are changes in personnel, hardware and software, or in the physical layout of the institution.

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## *Arrangement and Purpose*

THIS PUBLICATION IS DIVIDED INTO FIVE SECTIONS, TWO APPENDICES, AND A BIBLIOGRAPHY. There is one section for each of the four phases of disaster response planning. The fifth section contains procedures for stabilization and basic treatment of some collections once the recovery process is in full swing. The first appendix contains checklists and forms to organize and coordinate various activities during the response and planning phases. The second appendix lists different organizations, companies, and suppliers of disaster response services, consultation, and assistance. A current selective bibliography is appended to this work for consultation and for in-depth information about some of the more complex issues.

This work provides practical, down-to-earth information and advice for dealing with disasters and planning for their eventual occurrence. There are quite a number of books in the field of disaster response and preparedness that cover theories of planning and recovering print and nonprint materials. Some ideas from those books are included, but the theory contained within is minimal and will mainly be found in the fifth section of this book.

As the focus is practicality, this publication begins with the most important aspect of a disaster response plan, "Response." This section comes first, just in case a reader needs to implement a response before there is an opportunity to put an actual plan together. This first section contains information on small jobs and how to handle them in-house with the institution's own staff and suggestions for hiring out the labor and supervising staff. The goal is to get back to normal as soon as possible.

Computers play an integrated part in libraries, archives, and information centers. Catalogs, circulation systems, collections, and finding aids are located and preserved on these computers. So we must create disaster response plans for recovery of lost data and resumption of services. Plans that revolve around computers are usually called "contingency plans" and focus on restoring the programs and data carefully backed up every hour, day, or week. The specifics of planning for recovery of computer systems go beyond the scope of this publication. But I would be remiss to ignore the computers, so basic information and references about where the computer disaster response plan should be added or inserted will be included throughout. Some publications on the subject will be found in the bibliography.

The second section is "Recovering Collections and Restoring Operations," which discusses the resumption of services and operations. It includes guidelines for what to do when the institution is no longer in disaster mode, including evaluating the effectiveness of the plan and modifying it as needed with additional staff training in the weak spots.

For the sake of simplicity, this book deals with response and recovery separately. However, as Camila Alire points out in the *Library Disaster Planning and Recovery Handbook*, “the reality is that both activities [disaster response and recovery] can be operating at the same time.”<sup>1</sup>

“Prevention,” the third section, is closely tied in with the fourth section, “Planning.” Prevention can stand alone and be accomplished without a formal disaster response plan.

“Planning,” the fourth section, lists all responsibilities suggested for the team members; prioritizes the order of recovering damaged collections; and provides suggestions for staff training. This section is rounded out with information on how to plan for loss of computer services.

The fifth section, “Response and Recovery Procedures,” includes information on handling, packing, drying, and cleaning print and nonprint, paper and nonpaper materials. There is information about dealing with mold and what effects ozone has on collections. Some of this section is taken from information collected by the author and distributed at seminars for libraries, archives, historical societies, and disaster response companies.

There are two appendices. The first, “Checklists and Forms,” contains checklists and forms for use during all the phases of disaster response planning. They are fairly generic and so should be adapted for use at your institution. The second appendix, “Associations, Organizations,

and Companies,” contains a selected list of organizations, companies, and suppliers who can and will assist during disaster response, recovery, and planning. Not every organization or company is listed, mostly the large or national ones. Add your local contacts to make this plan your own.

The bibliography is divided into three parts. The first is a basic bibliography of books and articles that contain the basics of planning and response. The second part lists publications by topic and is designed to assist with specialized planning and recovery needs. The third part is a general bibliography containing additional readings that cross topic lines. The books, articles, and journals included in the bibliography are only some that are available in this flourishing field. Some citations refer to other bibliographies. Use the citations to educate the disaster response team and staff members of your institution.

While your plan is in draft form and when it is completed, place basic response procedures with phone numbers in the front of your disaster response manual for easy reference and contact. Post the daytime numbers for the disaster response team at phones for a swift response.

#### NOTE

1. Camila Alire, *Library Disaster Planning and Recovery Handbook* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2000), 12.

# Introduction

**D**isasters happen. You plan for them, work to prevent them, or turn a blind eye and hope one will never occur. Sooner or later, you must deal with one. Disasters come in all sizes. Sometimes disasters affect a small part of your building, sometimes the entire building, and in the most extreme and tragic times the entire area. Since you do not know when or how extensive the disaster will be, you can only be prepared.

If this is the case, then why write about disasters at all? Well, in the twenty-odd years I have been dealing with disasters, I know they will come, that we are never truly prepared, and that we will respond, recover, and go on to rebuild even better cultural institutions. To respond quickly and efficiently, you must plan and prepare for whatever comes your way. Plan for the small disaster and the rest will begin to fall into place.

So where do you start? This book provides guidelines for responding to disasters and recovering operations, materials, and resources, including staff and income. From there you start the process all over again, by planning and preventing the next disaster. Notice I started the process with response and not planning. The sad but true fact is that most institutions, most businesses, most people never plan for disasters. They respond to disasters and, in doing so, recover all they can, pick up the pieces, and plan for the next one. The logical place to begin is with response and a determined, coordinated effort to restore access to collections and resources, physical and digital.

When disaster strikes, your first reaction must be response. It is very important to follow your plan and carry out the steps and policies you created. So if you have a plan, activate it. If you don't have a plan, all is not lost.

Respond using your knowledge of the institution and its needs, mission, and collection development policies. Respond with a sense of priorities based upon those needs and your patron base. Respond with the goal of recovering access to services and resources as quickly and painlessly as possible. Respond, don't ignore the disaster, and don't expect others to do it for you.

Common sense tells us to evacuate a building in the case of fire, smoke, and sometimes severe weather. For tornados, find the tornado shelter in the building. Now is not

the time for heroics. Pull a fire alarm, call 911, and evacuate the building. Response is part of making certain all the people are safe.

Disasters come in various sizes and levels of seriousness. They strike departments, buildings, institutions, communities, and regions. Fire, flood, and broken water pipes are just as serious and stressful as hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, and blizzards. They wreak havoc on our institutions, our routines, and our lives. Bomb threats, hazardous waste contamination, and epidemics may be beyond our control but we can plan for them. Power and phone outages, loss of Internet, wireless, and e-mail access can cripple an institution and reference services if we don't plan for them. That's what disaster response is all about. Consider the various crises that can strike, large and small. Plan your response. Follow your plans. Ask for help. When it is all over, revise your plans so you are ready when the next disaster occurs.

This book provides guidance, suggestions, plans, and checklists for responding to and recovering from disasters. Planning is the key, planning for your response is the best insurance for surviving each disaster whenever it happens.

For the readers who don't have time to design a plan or read this book, this introduction provides guidance for responding to disasters.

## **Why Write a Disaster Response Plan?**

Disaster response and prevention policies are essential for the continuation of libraries, archives, historical societies, and museums. Our patrons expect that we are open for business at all hours and accessible when they want information. With the proliferation of computers and our dependence upon data and online services, downtime and lack of accessibility are detrimental to quality service and our reputation. So what is to be done? First, thinking about disasters, or "the worst," is the best first line of defense and prevention. If nothing ever went wrong, then disaster plans would be a waste of time. Sadly, this is not the case. Every day we read about floods, mold infections, and fires that cause irreparable harm to library and archival collections. Even a slowdown of service or power outage has untold repercussions in quality of service and the ability to provide information in a timely manner.

In the aftermath of the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, financial institutions immediately activated the contingency plans for their computer systems. Through careful planning and testing, mandated by the federal government, they were able to restore operations quickly. Those businesses that did not have plans or data backed up in remote locations struggled to get their operations up and running. In some cases, all documents and data were lost forever.

After Hurricane Katrina, libraries and archives, universities and businesses scrambled to provide safe work space for staff and recover collections as quickly as possible. Restoration of service, access to e-mail and the Internet were key to providing benefits to the displaced and a communication lifeline to residents of Louisiana and Mississippi.

After the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, cultural institutions provided information and e-mail access to individuals who lost homes and businesses, and helped reunite families. We don't always think about the roles libraries and archives play during a disaster. Libraries are safe havens from the chaotic storm of displaced lives. They are the information hub of our information-hungry society. If we don't plan for response to disasters and quick restoration of services, libraries and archives are not available for our patrons to use to resume their lives and contact with the outside world.

While dealing with the enormity of the human tragedy, disaster response teams plan to recover effectively and efficiently from the worst and to provide access to our resources as quickly as possible. While we cannot necessarily plan for every contingency, we can plan how we will restore services as quickly as possible. After each disaster, the library and archives community is reminded of the importance of foresight and planning for the loss of collections and data, services and information.

## **What Is a Disaster Response Plan and Why Is It Important?**

Disaster response is the procedures and processes whereby a team of trained individuals responds to a disaster and determines how to best recover the damaged materials so that "business as usual" can resume as quickly as possible. It is best if the response and

recovery procedures are worked out ahead of time. This will enable the disaster response team to implement response and recovery procedures as quickly as possible based upon well-thought-out priorities and techniques.

During the disaster response phase of the operation, volunteers, outside consultants, and contractors are often called in to assist with the recovery of damaged materials. It is important to consider the role of outside or volunteer assistance, where their services can best be used, how they can relieve physical and emotional stress from full-time staff, and how their services can be used to perform many of the labor-intensive procedures. A well-thought-out disaster response plan will decrease the amount of time it takes to implement disaster recovery procedures and should decrease the loss of materials and contents and increase the recovery rate.

In the planning phase, select the disaster response team. Team members are responsible for directing the activities during the response and recovery phases. The disaster response team allocates responsibilities and assists with recovery prioritization decisions. The team should be involved with training for themselves and any staff and volunteers who will work on recovering the collections and facility from the disaster.

Preparation, or preparedness, is the phase during which the disaster response team surveys the building and its collections for potential hazards and the identification of previous water leaks, and so on. During this phase, the team creates simple floor plans showing where collections are located and what is in various rooms. Identify the location of fire alarms, fire escapes and emergency doors, and fire extinguishers and mark floor plans accordingly. Disaster response planning and prevention, or preparedness, are performed when all is sane and quiet, and decisions are made in a rational, carefully considered manner.

On the flip side of the process, disaster response and recovery plans are activated when all is chaos, amidst conflicting demands to restore services, collections, and access to the building. There is often a tension between the disaster response team and the director, administrators, and patrons. The response phase concentrates upon doing just that, responding to the news that a “disaster” has occurred, assembling the appropriate staff, outside assistance, and supplies, while recovering the collection and the facility. The recovery phase concentrates on restoring the collection to a usable

form and resuming services in a timely, efficient, and cost-effective manner.

Taken as a whole, a disaster response plan is essential to the continuation of the institution, retention of patrons, and fast and efficient resumption of services to patrons and staff.

## Response

*At the worst possible moment*, the phone rings or your e-mail pings with news of a disaster in your institution. You are heading out the door to an important meeting, vacation, or just for the weekend. Your adrenaline surges as you call the disaster response team and race to the scene. Take a deep breath as you respond to the situation based upon the careful planning and heated discussions of the past months and years. All the planning and preparation finally pays off. It is time to put your plan into action.

There are three basic stages of response:

1. Respond to the disaster by assembling your team
2. Assess the scope of the damage
3. Begin recovery of services and collections

### ***Initial Response to the Disaster***

First assemble your disaster response team. During the planning phase, you selected two or three possible places to meet, one near the building if the library or building is damaged, in a quiet location out of the weather somewhere nearby. In the case of a small, isolated disaster in the building, meet in a conference room. Assemble your team at the appropriate location. If you do not have a plan or a predetermined location, select a place where you can talk and synchronize response activities.

If you do not have a team, gather together department heads, administrators, and staff with preservation and/or disaster response experience. Include someone from the IT (information technology) department. From this group, select a team leader other than the director. The director has a separate set of responsibilities during a disaster, as does the head of IT or computer services.

The team leader should have enough authority to supervise staff and assign tasks without asking permission

from someone else. In some institutions, the team leader is the head of facilities and maintenance, in other cases, the deputy director responsible for buildings and properties, in others, the head of preservation, archives, or special collections. For every institution, there is a logical person to be in charge. The only time the head of the disaster response team should be the director is if the library has only one staff member. If the disaster affects the entire institution or community, select a disaster response team member as liaison with the institutional or community emergency management team.

Once you have a disaster response team leader and team, then the director and the team leader should brief the team as to the scope of the disaster: what was damaged and what was affected. Was there a fire? A broken water pipe? Is there a power outage and are the phones and Internet affected? When can the team get access to the building(s)?

If the power is out, how long until the utility company can repair the damage and restore service? In the meantime, can your staff provide services such as reference and circulation without power? If so, implement manual circulation and reference procedures. If there are battery-operated computers with circulation capability, then use them.

Activate the IT disaster response plan to provide access to electronic services from a remote location or off-site. Move all public services operations to a remote location where some portable computers can provide access to electronic resources and circulation systems.

In these days of wireless access, instant communication, and remote accessibility to electronic collections, there is no excuse for loss of services to your patrons. Assign staff to provide reference from alternative locations while you restore services at your primary location.

If there was water or fire damage, consider closing the building until the scope of the damage to the collection can be ascertained.

If the structure of the building is damaged, from fire, flood, hurricane, tornado, or earthquake, a structural engineer should check the physical integrity of the building, ensuring it is safe to enter and work within. If not, then contact a firm that can remove the collections from the building and store them in a safe, secure, remote location. Discuss appropriate handling and packing procedures for this pack-out operation so materials do not sustain additional damage.

## Disaster Response Planning in a Nutshell

Consider the types of disasters most likely to happen or the crises that occur on a regular basis and plan for these, while keeping in mind disasters might destroy the entire building or collection.

When planning for disasters, consider what services would be most affected by loss of access to the building and its collections. Is it access to the specialized collections, microfilm, digital resources, and documents, or the loss of payroll and financial information that keeps the institution funded? What other services will be disrupted? Other issues to consider and record:

- Who has the authority to order and pay for supplies and services that are needed?
- Who can make such decisions as calling the insurance company in to assess the loss and asking the disaster response firm and consultants to determine the scope of loss and the amount of work needed to “restore” the collection?
- Who has the authority to designate staff to “other duties as assigned,” hire temporary staff, or rent space and equipment to work? How does having a union at your institution change work procedures?
- Who is in charge of discussing the situation with the board of trustees or the director of the institution?
- Who will be the media spokesperson for the institution if there is no public information officer?
- Who is responsible for declaring a disaster for the computer systems? Where will they set up temporary operation? What firm or individual stores the backup tapes? How quickly can the online system get back up and running?

These are just some of the many issues to be considered when designing the response portion of a plan. If you have ever been involved in a disaster, then you are aware that making decisions on the fly is not best for the library’s collection or its personnel. Everyone is working under a high adrenaline level and may find it difficult to make educated, rational assessments of the situation and the condition of the remaining collections. Important materials could be damaged by being overlooked or discarded accidentally. Recovery decisions

need to be prioritized ahead of time, during the planning process. Disaster response planning takes time but is well worth the effort.

## What If the Disaster Happens before You Have a Plan?

If you don't have a plan and a disaster occurs, take the following seven steps.

1. Gather together key staff in a quiet place, either in the building or near it.
2. Assess the scope of the damage and potential disruption of primary services and functions. Review affected collections for importance within the library's mission and in terms of the magnitude of damage from water or fire.
3. Contact colleagues outside of the institution for assistance and recommendations for consultants and disaster response/drying companies.
4. Assign staff to recovery responsibilities:
  - Performing physical work
  - Acting as liaison with the administration and performing administrative work
  - Communicating with both internal and external organizations (with media and others outside of the institution)
  - Contacting your insurance agent (Ask about disaster response assistance and available funds.)
  - Working with disaster response companies and consultants
  - Locating alternative work areas and supplies
5. Meet again with key staff to coordinate the recovery operation.
6. Begin the recovery operation, starting with primary priorities and services.
7. Start phasing in the return of primary services and functions.

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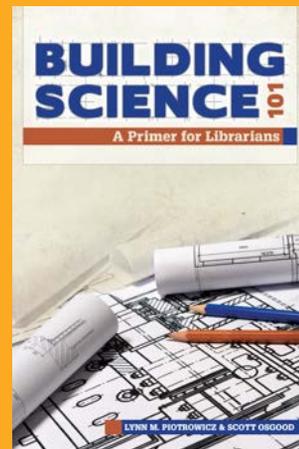
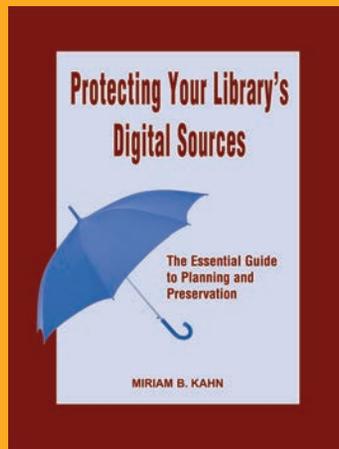
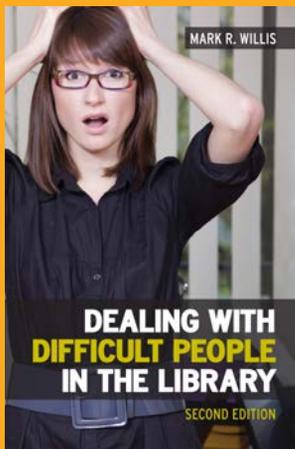
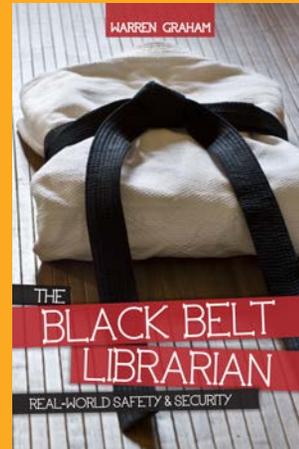
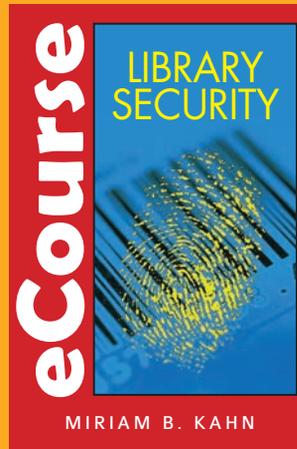
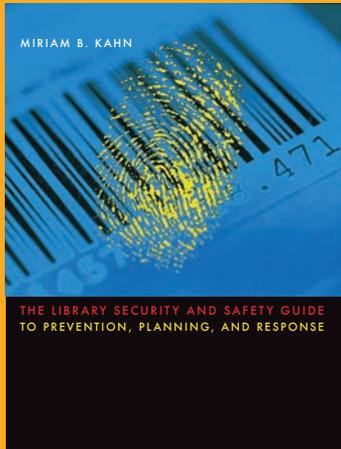
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