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National Library of Chile - Disaster Prevention

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Abstract:

The objective of this presentation is to make known the present and future disaster prevention and emergency response work of the National Library of Chile. This institution became the regional headquarters (Chile and Argentina) for IFLA PAC in 2003. From this time onwards our Library has begun the task of developing an action plan implement the objectives of IFLA PAC, strengthening the initiatives already in place and creating a National Blue Shield Committee.

The National Library has already been working for many years¹ in the preservation and conservation of its collections and in the implementation of plans to save people and collections in the event of disasters. Our nomination as regional headquarters for IFLA PAC has given us further impetus to undertake yet more initiatives to protect our cultural heritage.

Recent major efforts have been oriented towards:

- a) Collecting and updating the existing IFLA PAC and Blue Shield information about preservation, conservation and disasters.
- b) Checking that the measures and actions taken by our institution are in line with the recommendations of IFLA PAC.
- c) Forming a working group to carry out the preservation and conservation tasks in accordance with IFLA PAC recommendations.

¹ See Conservation and Preservation in the National Library of Chile sent to IFLA PAC for publication in the 2003 newsletter .

- d) Creating the National Blue Shield Committee.
- e) Preparing a Work Plan, using the Blue Shield perspective, to cover our institution and our role as regional headquarters for IFLA PAC. This plan can also serve as an example for other institutions.

The actions undertaken by the National Library have been supported by the National Centre for Conservation and Restoration (CNRC) and by the Integrated Hygiene and Security Committee (involving both staff and management) of the Library. Both of these entities have been involved in these conservation, restoration and disaster prevention initiatives, bringing their own distinct perspectives and mandates to bear upon the task at hand.

- The objective of this presentation is to make known the measures that our institution has adopted towards the development of an Emergency and Disaster Plan and the actions that we have taken.

The Integrated Committee for Hygiene and Security (recreated by law in 1968 with updated rules and responsibilities), which today operates in the National Library, must advocate on behalf of the security and well being of the workers with special emphasis on disaster management, including risks to heritage items, equipment and fittings in the building. The law establishes that a Committee of this type must be formed in any building with more than 25 staff. For this reason, our institution and building has a group of staff who devote part of their time to working for the Integrated Committee.

In 2003 the Integrated Committee of the National Library developed a disaster evacuation plan for staff and carried out a practise evacuation.

A special sub-committee was formed to carry out this plan:

- Team leader for emergency response
- Team Leader for security and response
- Team leader for administration

Working with this group were “brigades” made up of:

- Fire Brigade
- First Aid Brigade
- Evacuation Brigade
- Security Brigade

The security guards made up another important support group, evaluating the situation, sounding the alarm and making phone calls to Police, Fire Brigade etc. Much of their work, of course, takes place before an eventual disaster, as they must constantly maintain the equipment and practise the tasks needed to confront an emergency.

Each section of the library also has information about the resources available to confront emergencies, such as:

- Plans showing the location of fire extinguishers
- Security zones
- Evacuation routes disseminated throughout the building

- First-aid kits
- Annotated Emergency Plan
- 2003 Evacuation Plan

The Emergency Plan has the following contents:

- Introduction
- Objectives
- Concepts
- Principles and responsibility of the management team of the National Library
- Structure of the Plan
- Evacuation policies and plans
- Technical resources
- Preventative measures
- Procedures: Fires, Earthquakes, floods, threatening phone calls and assaults.
- Evacuation and types of evacuation.
- Recommendations
- Conclusions

International recommendations were followed to develop the 2003 Emergency Plan . The Plan was also discussed with the Chilean National Institute for Insurance and the Fire Brigade, who had previously checked the building to establish the principal fire risks and the most appropriate evacuation zones.

During the first semester of 2004, with the National Blue Shield Committee already formed, and acting as regional headquarters for IFLA PAC, we have looked at work in the following areas:

1. Development of a Blue Shield Work Plan, in collaboration with the National Centre for Conservation and Restoration (CNRC), the National Archive (an institution that shares the same building with the National Library) and the National Library. These efforts are directed towards developing a disaster plan, together with the Integrated Committee, to cover both personnel and physical heritage items. The implementation of Blue Shield actions to prevent disasters caused by earthquakes (which are often followed by fires and floods) has been given priority due to the fact that they represent one of the most common disasters to affect Chile.

The Integrated Committee evacuation plans for personnel in the case of emergencies works in a complementary way with Blue Shield Commission for the rescue and protection of heritage items.

2. A structural study of the building was undertaken as a first priority to understand its level of vulnerability and to decide the best way to minimise the dangers to the heritage collections in the case of a disaster. The study was carried out by the department of earthquake- resistant structures of the University of Chile.
3. Efforts are being made to locate the original plans for the electricity and water supply to the building. The plans for later modifications and repairs are available but the original plans have not appeared.

4. The Fire Brigade of Santiago, in particular Brigade #6 that specialises in heritage buildings, has been asked to visit the National Library three times a year, to ensure that all new fire brigade staff have knowledge of the buildings, vulnerable zones and exits. The first visits and ensuing reports have already been made, the last one in May, 2004.
5. A seminar was given for staff about prevention of risks and protection of heritage collections, with particular emphasis on the events that could occur with an earthquake. Various leaflets already exist on this subject and a training plan, that starts with a three hour course has already begun. The Heritage Emergency National Task Force (USA) Emergency Response and Salvage Wheel has been translated into Spanish and will be distributed to Library staff and other institutions thanks to the support of the local Andes Foundation.
6. The process of identifying the collections of greatest value and their level of vulnerability in terms of the state of the building, is continuing. The possibility of undertaking work on some of the store rooms for the bibliographic treasures is also being analysed.
7. A theoretical plan for the evacuation staff and the disaster prevention and protection of the collections will be written in collaboration with the Integrated Committee of the National Library.
8. A photographic record of the current state of the building will be carried out and will be stored, together with a copy of the inventory, in an external location.
9. Our experience in the preparation and implementation of disaster plans will be shared with other heritage institutions in Chile.
10. The IFLA PAC programme will be disseminated in the next Conservation Congress sponsored by the Universidad SEK, which will take place in Santiago in October, 2004.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the National Library only joined IFLA PAC and Blue Shield in 2004, a substantial number of important initiatives have already been undertaken. It is an opportunity that has presented us with duties and challenges that can't be ignored, but that we have assumed with a positive spirit.

As a first step we have been careful to set realistic goals that we have been able to meet, creating experiences that we have shared with other bibliographic centres of the Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums (DIBAM). These goals will become more ambitious as we progress.

The work already carried out has been possible thanks to the efforts of the Conservation Department and the Integrated Committee of the National Library together with the National Centre for Conservation and Restoration (CNRC). These groups will continue their support in 2004.

Financial restrictions present the major obstacle to our plans, but we remain optimistic about the possibilities to create greater consciousness of these issues in our region.