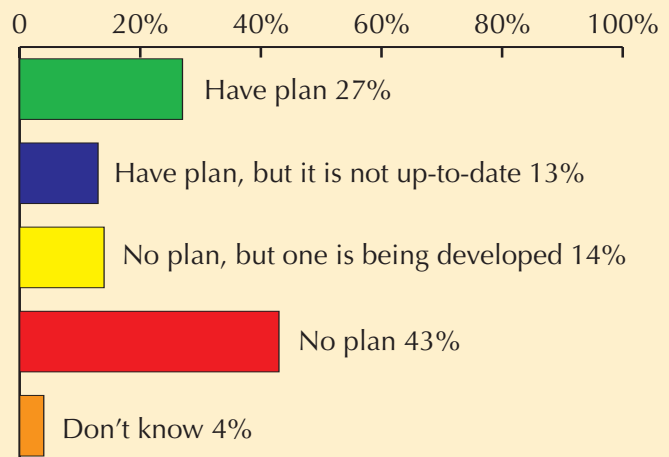


Chapter 6: Emergency Planning and Security

A Public Trust at Risk: The Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America's Collections was released just as the tumultuous 2005 hurricane season was ending. As reports of damaged collections and historic buildings came out of the Gulf Coast, Heritage Preservation discovered that institutions with a disaster plan were able to recover more of their collections. Therefore, it was particularly poignant that one of the key findings of the Heritage Health Index was that 80% of collecting institutions have no disaster plan with staff trained to carry it out.

At institutions holding American art, 43% have no written emergency/disaster plan that includes collections, and another 14% have no plan currently but are developing one (figure 6.1). For institutions holding American art that have a written disaster plan (27%) or those with a plan that is not up-to-date (13%), only 61% have staff trained on those plans. Especially in the case of this question on staff training for disasters, Heritage Preservation considered responses of “don’t know” (13%) as a *de facto* “no”

Fig. 6.1 Institutions with American Art Holdings with Written Emergency/Disaster Plan That Includes Collections



response (figure 6.2). Cross tabulating these two questions, Heritage Preservation determined that 74% of institutions holding American art have no disaster plan with staff trained to carry it out (figure 6.3).

Again, this finding is better than the total Heritage Health Index figure of 80%, but not signifi-

Fig. 6.2 Institutions with American Art Holdings with Staff Trained on Emergency/Disaster Plan

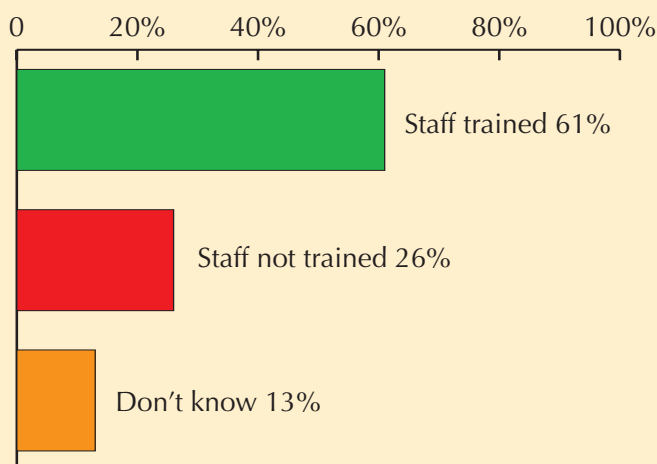


Fig. 6.3 Institutions with American Art Holdings with Emergency/Disaster Plan with Staff Trained to Carry It Out

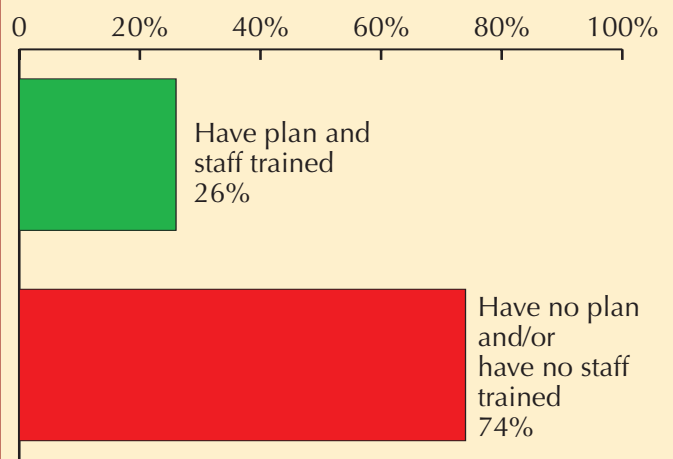


Fig. 6.4 Institutions with American Art Holdings with Emergency/Disaster Plan with Staff Trained to Carry It Out (by size)

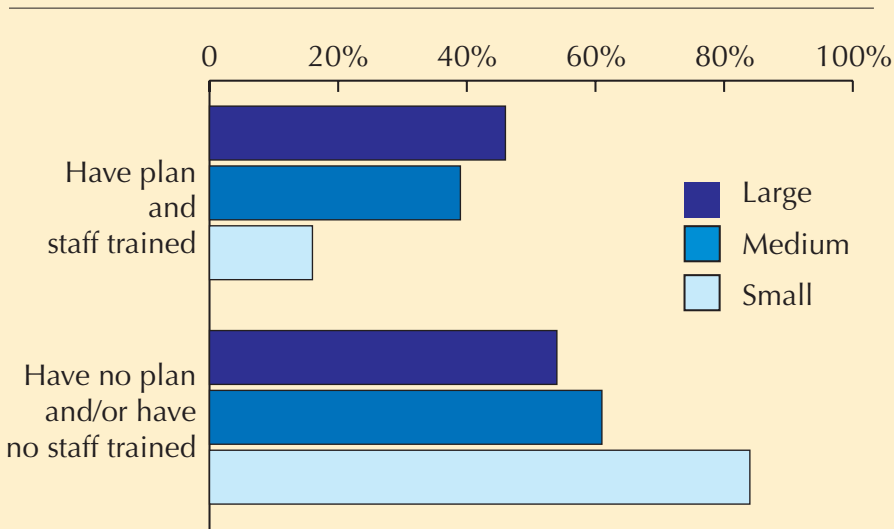
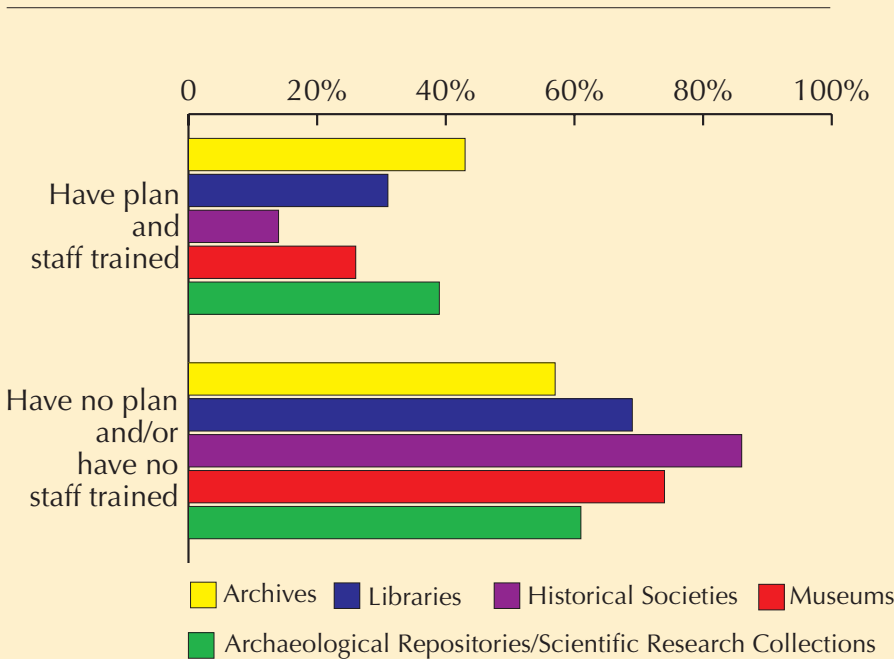


Fig. 6.5 Institutions with American Art Holdings with Emergency/Disaster Plan with Staff Trained to Carry It Out (by type)



(86%), and museums (74%) are particularly unprepared (figure 6.5).

One thing that catastrophic events like Hurricane Katrina and the attacks on the World Trade Center brought to light was that it could sometimes take weeks or even months before collecting institution staff are allowed back into the area. Even a local disaster—a collapsed roof due to heavy rains or a burst water pipe—can completely interrupt institutional operations. Therefore, it is essential that thorough collections records exist and that they, along with insurance papers and other documents, are stored offsite.

The Heritage Health Index found that at institutions holding American art, 35% have no copies of vital collections records stored offsite. Another 35% of these institutions have only some of these records stored offsite (figure 6.6).

Institutions holding American art collections do report slightly better security for collections. The Heritage Health Index stated the question about security systems broadly—for some institutions a sophisticated intrusion detection system is important, while for others a vol-

cantly. The data is also not encouraging when viewed by size of institution: 54% of large institutions, 61% of medium institutions, and 84% of small institutions have no plan with staff trained (figure 6.4). Libraries (69%), historical societies

unenter sitting at the front door is appropriate. However, only half of institutions have adequate security systems; 14% reported inadequate or no systems, and 36% stated that some areas where collections are held are not secured adequately.

Fig. 6.6 Institutions with American Art Holdings with Copies of Vital Collection Records Stored Offsite

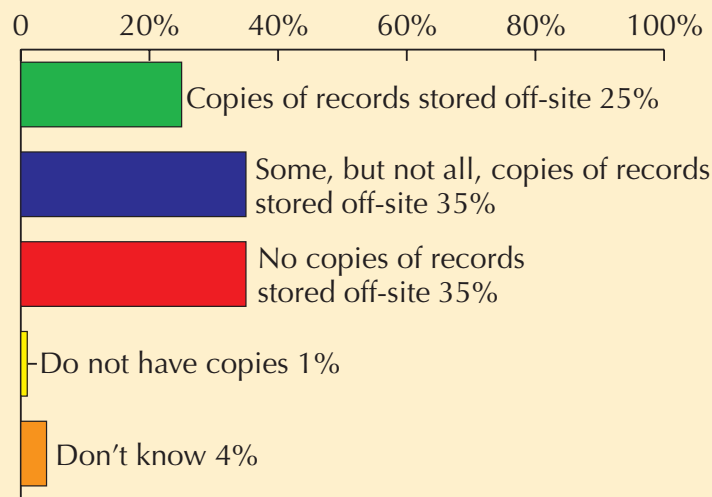
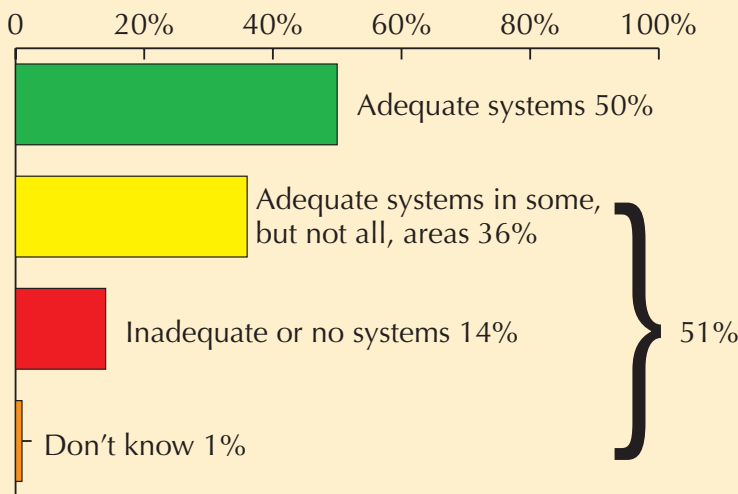


Fig. 6.7 Institutions with American Art Holdings' Adequacy of Security Systems



At art museums, only 60% report having adequate security in all areas where collections are held; the figure for large institutions is 53%. Despite these findings, security ranked as one of the lowest concerns, with only 11% having an urgent need. ♦

The Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art in Biloxi, Mississippi, sustained serious damage when Hurricane Katrina roared ashore in August 2005. Because of an emergency plan, the museum's collection of pottery by artist George Ohr and collection of contemporary American ceramics—including works by Paul Soldner and Toshiko Takaezu—weathered the storm safely in a secure building and were then evacuated to the Mobile Museum of Art in Alabama. The museum's nineteenth-century historic frame house, Pleasant Reed, used to interpret African-American life in the early twentieth century, was washed away by the storm surge—only its chimney remains. Work began right away to salvage library materials and art objects, such as those by folk artist Mose Toliver, that had sustained water and mold damage. Conservators from the University of Delaware's Winterthur Conservation Program visited to give advice on the treatment of damaged materials, and the university has received grant funding to conserve some of the most damaged objects. The museum also received a \$30,000 National Endowment for the Humanities grant to support the recovery, cleaning, and conservation treatment of artifacts, as well as assessment and temporary storage of the collections.



After Hurricane Katrina caused mold and other damage to artworks such as this one, by Mose Toliver, at the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art in Biloxi, Mississippi, emergency funding allowed conservation work to begin immediately.