After Action Report – Lessons Learned – Ute Pass Historical Society (CO)

Donna Finicle, President, & Karla Schweitzer, Registrar, of the Ute Pass Historical Society recounted their experience evacuating a collection during the Waldo Canyon Fire. The collection was evacuated on June 27, 2012, and returned home on July 3, 2012. A number of ideas shared during the debriefing include:

 Be aware that road closures can prevent you from taking a direct route to the closest logical facility to temporarily store the collection. University of Colorado Springs offered to store the Ute Pass Historical Society’s collection, however, due to road closures, they had to go west to Divide.

 Be aware it’s hard to think straight. The experience is emotional and can rattle you. Exhibits and books housed in the library across the street were completely forgotten when deciding what to evacuate. Did not have time to find temperature and environmentally controlled storage space. Had to take advantage of whatever space they could find.

 Personal and professional responsibilities will collide. One staff member experienced a mandatory evacuation for their residence, the birth of a grandson and safeguarding their family and could not assist the society.

 Prepare visuals of items that are a high priority to evacuate. Not everyone volunteering may not what a stereoscope looks like.

 Have a prioritized list of things to evacuate. When prioritizing, think about business and personnel records, inventory and archival records as well as collections.

 Create and evaluate a disaster plan on a regular basis. Can’t always count on the same people being available because people come and go, particularly in a small institution that relies on a volunteer working board.

 Deciding if and when to evacuate can be difficult. When do you get out of there? Building a consensus among a working board can take time.

 You may have to use whatever boxes you can get your hands on and they may not be museum quality.

 The society was not able to do anything to protect the historical structures which were actually owned by the city.

 It is important to document actions taken, including volunteer and paid hours spent, equipment used and other expenses as these may be useful for the government entities to obtain matching funds from assistance grants (such as Fire Management Assistance Grants (F-MAG). Damages sustained and losses should also be documented for insurance and other possible reimbursement sources.

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