

Philadelphia Alliance for Response
12/4/07 Meeting
Summary Report
By Tom Claresson, PALINET

The third meeting of the Philadelphia Alliance for Response group attracted nearly 40 attendees to discuss program updates and hear presentations on “Avoiding Holiday Disasters and Winterizing Your Institution.” In addition, plans for disaster education sessions and Alliance for Response meetings in 2008 were discussed

The meeting began with a presentation from Stacy Irving, Senior Director, Crime Prevention Services, Center City District Philadelphia. Stacy described a variety of efforts in the Center City District to provide safety ambassadors and emergency preparedness information and training. Stacy’s main focus was on the “Alert Philadelphia” program, a real-time text messaging program which provides information on incidents or emergencies including homeland security advisories, crime alerts, fires, bomb threats, and other disaster situations. The system has over 1500 users who are part of 26 user groups. Stacy said the “Cultural Institution Group” has only 11 institutions signed up as of December 1, 2007, and appealed to the Alliance meeting attendees to learn more about the service and sign up to participate. Stacy can provide more information via e-mail at sirving@centercityphila.org

The City’s Managing Director of Emergency Management and Preparedness, Mary Ann Marrocolo, gave an overview presentation on the Office of Emergency Management, focusing on three activities she had previously announced to the Alliance Group. The OEM and Commissioner of Records’ Office had previously distributed a letter and form asking cultural heritage institutions to sign up for an Emergency Liaison Program, which will build communication between Emergency Managers and key resource people at each cultural heritage institution. Response to the letter was good, and more information about the program will be announced in 2008. Work is also moving forward on coordination of citywide Incident Notification systems, and the potential for cultural heritage representatives to participate on the City’s Emergency Operations Group. Liam O’Keefe, Assistant Managing Director of Emergency Management, briefly described a new credentialing program called the “Corporate Emergency Access System,” a pre-event credentialing program that authenticates critical business employees for access to restricted areas following a disaster or emergency via a secure identification card recognized by law enforcement. More information on this program will be sent to Alliance attendees in future weeks.

Robert Cheetham of Avencia spoke about the continuing work on a Geographic Information System (G.I.S.) database of Philadelphia cultural heritage institutions, which may be able to be used for disaster planning and recovery purposes. He will keep the Alliance for Response group updated on the progress of this project at future meetings.

The group heard an update from the Delaware Disaster Assistance Team (D-DAT), a new group that has been formed in the State of Delaware by the Division of Libraries and the State Archives and Records Center to assist libraries, archives, and other cultural heritage institutions in planning for and recovering from disasters. The group has held three initial meetings, and developed a successful grant proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities to fund further expansion of their activities. The grant will include statewide disaster planning activities in Spring 2008. Finally, in other consortial news, Lois Fischer Black of Lehigh University spoke of work between Lehigh, Lafayette College, and Muhlenberg University to establish a Disaster Mutual Aid assistance group.

Kim Andrews, Preservation Field Services Officer at the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA), led a panel on “Avoiding Holiday Disasters and Winterizing Your Institution.” Kim suggested that each institution hold an annual review of their standard maintenance plan, but also do seasonal inspections of their building to guard against disasters. Particular areas to check to winterize your building include roofs, basements, your pest management program, frozen pipes, thermostat setbacks (which should be avoided), and checks of your heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system. Exterior walls, ceilings beneath windows, and attic ceilings should be checked for evidence of moisture from roof and window leaks.

Douglas Miller of Pennsbury Manor suggested that cultural organizations can benefit from getting to know their local Fire Marshal. To plan for situations where there is a power loss, Miller suggested that Alliance participants review OSHA standards for safe work environments during power outages. Other precautions for these incidents included stockpiling critical equipment and extra fuses. Miller also cautioned Alliance institutions to monitor the health of their living collections, and called for monitoring of tree limbs and other items which might fall when damaged by wind, ice, or snow.

Stephen Olenik and Bran Lynch of BELFOR USA’s Office in Exton spoke of the type of disasters their organization sees especially in Winter, and stressed the importance of working with disaster recovery contractors in advance so they can quickly respond to situations at your institution.

Finally, a series of disaster education activities for 2008 were announced. This series of activities are sponsored by the National Archives and Records Administration, Mid-Atlantic Region, CCAHA, and PALINET. The first event, a “Disaster Plan Writing Retreat for Cultural Institutions,” is scheduled for March 19 at PALINET – *please see the attached registration form to sign up for this event*. A two-day workshop from CCAHA, “Be Prepared: Disaster Planning, Fire Safety, and Security,” will be offered May 12-13 at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, with a slate of nationally-recognized presenters. Finally, a session on “Disaster Plan Testing for Cultural Organizations: Table Top Exercise” is tentatively scheduled for Fall 2008 at NARA Mid-Atlantic. Further information on all of these sessions will be distributed to all participating Alliance for Response institutions.

For more information on all of these initiatives, please contact Tom Clareson, PALINET, at clareson@palinet.org or phone 614-439-1796.