



Seattle Alliance for Response Kick-off Forums

June 15, 2006

Museum of History and Industry, Seattle, Washington

The first in a new round of Alliance for Response Forums was held in Seattle at the Museum of History and Industry on June 15, 2006. About 90 people attended the meeting; 20 percent were from outside the cultural field, including first responders and local officials.

After welcoming remarks from host Gary Menges, University of Washington Libraries, and Moira Egan, Vice President, External Relations, Heritage Preservation, the program focused on the types of emergencies likely to happen in the Seattle area and ways to prepare.

Two representatives of the Seattle Fire Department offered valuable advice on how to build relationships with first responders and work with firefighters on the scene in a disaster. Deputy Chief Gary English and Battalion Chief Eric Lindahl both emphasized how essential it is that they be briefed on hazardous materials in a building so they can protect the lives of firefighters. They also urged that institutions designate a staff member as the liaison to communicate collections priorities.

Other speakers included John Chaney, Executive Director of Historic Seattle, who reviewed the collaborative effort to save the historic Cadillac Hotel building after the Nisqually earthquake, and Bill Miele, Vice President, Risk Services, at Safeco Insurance Companies, who discussed ways that institutions can work with insurance companies to advance preparedness. Preston Huff of the National Archives and Records Administration's Southwest Region reviewed NARA's initiatives to assist local governments in saving their records after Hurricane Katrina, and Steve Dalton of Boston College discussed how Boston institutions have worked together since their Alliance for Response Forum in 2004.

In an afternoon break-out session, participants addressed specific questions like: What kind of disasters are likely to impact cultural institutions? How can first responders and cultural heritage institutions work together more effectively? What are three follow-up activities that can keep cultural heritage preservation efforts moving forward in our area?

A theme emerged during the small-group discussions: those who want to prevent disasters and protect Seattle's rich and diverse collections must find new ways of working together. Examples include:

- Staffs of collecting institutions need to learn the language that firefighters and other first responders use when they respond to a disaster;
- Facilities and collections staff members within an institution need to know each other, share information, and understand each others' perspectives;
- Neighboring institutions can share information, supplies, and plans.

Evaluations of the forum were very positive. Participants came away with "local resources I had not known of before" and "great ideas to bring back to my institution." Of primary interest to a number of participants was, "Understanding how the first responders operate and the information they need." At the end of the day, more 20 signed on to take part in cooperative disaster planning efforts in the future.

BMS CAT provided funding for the lunch and refreshments and the Museum of History and Industry hosted the meeting.