

# How to Prevent An Information Disaster



Don't neglect this key aspect of risk management. Once disaster occurs, it's too late.

by Van Carlisle

Imagine the crisis you would face if you lost records crucial to your organization's operation. To prevent such an information disaster, you need to establish a vital-records protection program. Here are the steps to take:

**Maintain** a backup of your main computer file server. Keep backup copies of key databases and financial files. Vital records include:

- contracts that prove ownership of property, equipment, vehicles, and products
- operational records such as current or unaudited accounting and tax records, current personnel and payroll records, client account histories, and shipping delivery records
- current case history files.

**Back up** your data at least once a week. Store a copy offsite or, if that's not feasible, store your data in a fireproof safe. Most organizations, especially since 9/11, are shifting to a combined on and off site storage. This is sometimes referred to as a "belt and suspenders" approach.

**Store** one copy of your insurance policies, vehicle and property titles, vehicle registrations, and

bank account numbers in either a fireproof safe or a safe deposit box (which will be fireproof by default).

**Procure** fire-resistant safes and filing cabinets for on-site storage. You will always, at one point, have vital records on site, and obviously, no one can predict the precise time a business interruption will occur.

**Be wary of products that claim to be "built to" a certain UL class specification claim.**

Many managers believe that standard filing equipment offers fire protection. This thinking is erroneous and dangerous. Remember, you're protecting your most vital information assets. Seek products tested by Underwriters' Laboratory (UL) or other nationally known independent testing labs. Steer clear of equipment with manufacturers' or non-independent ratings. UL is the best, as no other testing and standards organization matches its reputation.

Be wary of products that claim to be "built to" a certain UL class

specification claim. This is marketing-driven wordplay, pure and simple. It leads people to falsely believe they're getting a UL rating, but in reality it's just the manufacturer's dubious claim. UL has never tested it, and how it will stand up to a real fire is anyone's guess. ■

#### Resources

For a crisis-management fact sheet, see [www.nonprofitrisk.org](http://www.nonprofitrisk.org). Also see these *Nonprofit World* articles at [www.snpo.org](http://www.snpo.org):

- **Will You Be Ready When Disaster Strikes?**, Vol. 18, No. 3.
- **Too Precious to Lose: Backing Up Your Data**, Vol. 7, No. 1.
- **Do You Need a Record-Saving Policy?**, Vol. 19, No. 6.
- **Contingency Planning: Facing Disaster and Surviving**, Vol. 11, No. 3.

*Van Carlisle became CEO of Fire King, a security and loss prevention company, at age 24 in 1975 and acquired controlling interest in the company a year later. He studied criminal justice at the University of Louisville and served six years in the Air National Guard Security Police Force.*