

DISASTER PLANNING NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR THE NORTH GREECE FIRE DISTRICT

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January, 2005
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DISASTER PLANNING NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR THE NORTH GREECE FIRE DISTRICT

Prepared for:

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SUMMARY

The North Greece Fire District has taken a proactive approach since 1989 to maintaining its vital records. The district engaged CGR in fall 2004 with funds from a State Archives and Records Administration (SARA) grant to help the district develop a records disaster recovery program. As part of the project the district asked CGR to make other recommendations about its practices, based on our observations, that will help the district improve records management and ensure business continuity in the event of a disaster.

The report describes CGR observations and recommended approaches for the future. From an operational standpoint CGR finds the district is already well positioned to maintain operations in the event of a disaster, due to extensive backup systems. From a records-keeping standpoint, CGR strongly recommends the district consider a more streamlined approach to records management, ideally through enhanced reliance on electronic technology. If district records managers are not comfortable with such an approach the district is urged to consider a more aggressive “weeding” of paper incident records prior to microfilming. A third option is to continue the current system. Finally, CGR has included information to help the district take additional preventive measures and lessen the impact should a disaster occur.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CGR acknowledges the North Greece Fire District employees who took time from their daily activities to discuss district activities, record-keeping practices, and current disaster recovery capabilities. In particular, we'd like to thank the District's project director, William Sommers, CFO, for his helpfulness and attention to detail. We also appreciate the significant assistance provided by Thomas Grace, Chief; Ann Baxter, Secretary and Records Management Officer; and Andy Hinds, IT Specialist.

CONTRIBUTING STAFF

Charles Zettek Jr., Director of Government Management Services, provided oversight and review of this project. Vicki Brown, Research Associate, conducted the field research, drafted the report, and contributed the core of the written recommendations for CGR.

I. OVERVIEW

In fall 2004 the North Greece Fire District engaged CGR to conduct a Disaster Planning Needs Assessment of district records to ensure that access to vital information at its headquarters, 1766 Latta Road, can occur as soon as possible in the event of a disaster. As part of the project the district asked CGR to make any other recommendations about its practices, based on our observations, related to business continuity and disaster planning.

The district funded this project with a 2004-05 New York State Archives and Records Administration (SARA) grant for a disaster planning needs assessment because it has no plan in place to protect vital records in the event of a disaster. Disasters that could create records emergencies for the district include a broad spectrum of problems, for example, explosions, tornados, and flooding.

CGR agreed to:

- ❖ Survey district records (e.g., electronic, paper, microfilm),
- ❖ Identify records vital to district operations,
- ❖ Identify the related risks and vulnerabilities,
- ❖ Assess current disaster recovery practices in place, and
- ❖ Develop recommendations to improve disaster readiness.

The North Greece Fire District has been in existence since 1922, operates as a separate local government, and serves a population of approximately 35,000 residents residing in a 45-square mile area. It also serves as the command center, in the event of a disaster or major weather-related community disruption, for fire, ambulance, police, and school transportation officials in the area located west of the Genesee River to the Orleans County border. District officials note that should a true emergency occur in Monroe County, North Greece has the capability to provide backup to the entire county. (Note: the officially designated backup is the Gates Fire Department.)

In terms of service area, North Greece is the largest fire district in Monroe County, and from a financial standpoint its \$4.6 million annual budget makes it one of the big four fire districts in the county. In recent years the district has been responding to a growing number of incidents, due primarily to population growth spurred by new housing developments. Five years ago the district

responded to approximately 1,500 incidents annually and today the number is 3,000. Approximately 60% of current incidents are emergency medical service or EMS-related, 30% are service calls (e.g., water problems, auto alarms), and the remainder involve fires or motor vehicle accidents.

In addition to the headquarters fire station, the district has two other stations at 2030 English Road and 645 No. Greece Road. The latter facility opened in fall 2004, and like the headquarters building, has a specially designated records storage room, designed to SARA specifications. The district's fulltime staff of 29 and part-time staff of 33 operate the three stations 24-7, every week of the year.

Since 1989 North Greece has taken a proactive approach to ensuring that vital records are properly maintained. The district strives to ensure that its record procedures and practices are consistent with SARA guidelines, and bases its record retention on the state's MU-1 schedule. In addition, North Greece has a Records Advisory Board, Records Management Officer, and the CFO spends 25% of his time on records management.

Over the past seven years, North Greece has secured SARA grants to 1) inventory its records, 2) conduct a needs assessment, 3) develop and implement a records management program, and 4) microfilm permanent records. It has a new microfilm reader and in recent years has budgeted funds annually to maintain its program of microfilming all incident records.

This report outlines CGR's recommendations for disaster planning, migration and recovery for district business critical records.

II. PROJECT APPROACH

CGR held an initial meeting with the CFO and conducted an on-site review of records and operations at district headquarters. CGR subsequently made a lengthy site visit to the district, and interviewed the four staff members directly involved with and/or responsible for vital records.

As part of this process CGR identified the district's major record series, how long they are kept, and the format in which they are stored. (Note: microfilming now occurs on a regular basis, with originals kept by an outside vendor and duplicates used within the district.)

- ❖ District minutes – permanent, microfilmed (paper originals are also kept).
- ❖ Payroll records – permanent, microfilmed.
- ❖ Other financial records – kept seven years in paper format, then destroyed.
- ❖ Incident reports – permanent. Current year incidents and previous two years are kept in paper format. Subsequently all incident reports (e.g., fires, accidents, EMS calls, auto alarms, water problems) are microfilmed.
- ❖ Property records and construction drawings – permanent, microfilmed.
- ❖ Training records – permanent, microfilmed.
- ❖ Voting registration records – permanent, microfilmed.

CGR also reviewed the MU-1 guidelines for fire districts, discussed the project with Gail Fischer, SARA Regional Advisory Officer, and talked to the top operations and business officials at the Henrietta Fire District, which handles approximately 3,500 incidents a year, and conferred with the Brighton Fire District, which handles approximately 2,600 to 2,800 incidents annually. Both have records needs comparable to North Greece. Finally, CGR discussed records retention with the Rochester Fire Department.

III. OBSERVATIONS

As a result of its proactive approach to all aspects of its operations, North Greece already has many elements of a disaster recovery plan for its headquarters in place. CGR observed the following positive aspects of existing operations:

The district has taken significant steps to ensure there will be ongoing response to incident calls in the event of a disaster.

- There is a dual dispatch system at headquarters. If one side goes down, the other can respond.
- A mechanical system is available at headquarters as an additional backup.
- If the district loses a land line, it can communicate with officers via cell phone. Officers are equipped with cell phones and the four emergency response trucks have cell phones.
- Because it operates as the command center for major community disruptions, the district has auxiliary power in place in the event of a power outage. The communication room at headquarters can run on generators, and the server has a hefty backup until the generator kicks on.
- The Gates Fire Department is positioned to back up North Greece in the short term (at least two weeks) if a disaster shuts down North Greece headquarters.
- If communications capability were to be lost at North Greece headquarters for any length of time, the district has smaller base radio operations at its two other stations that could function, albeit in a more cumbersome fashion, for radio communications. Bringing in one or more computers to ensure a makeshift communications operations is also possible. (Note: enhancing radio capability at one of the other two stations has been considered, but current cost estimates are in the neighborhood of \$50,000, which is beyond the district's current budget capability.)
- Notebooks have been placed in each of the district's trucks that contain essential information (e.g., street locations), and these notebooks can be used should headquarters computers be out of commission.

Plans are in development, probably in the upcoming budget year, to place a second server at the new 645 No. Greece Road station, further strengthening the district's electronic capabilities.

- Plans are in development, probably in the upcoming budget year, to place a second server at the new 645 North Greece Road station, strengthening the district's ability to communicate electronically should the headquarters server be out of service due to a disaster. Both servers would maintain identical information.
- Back-up tapes of information on the headquarters server are made daily.
- The IT specialist routinely monitors the server regarding security issues.
- Business critical skills are duplicated. For example, 1) although the treasurer normally writes checks, does payroll and accesses bank accounts, the district secretary can also do these functions, and 2) the outside accountant can close district books each month, should the treasurer be unable to complete this function at any time.
- Backups for many business critical records, except for the most recent period, already exist, since audit and payroll services are provided by off-site specialists (see contact list at end of report).
 - The accountant who serves as the district auditor keeps balance sheets, audit reports and general ledger detail for seven years. He also receives, on a monthly basis, a back-up CD of all files on the district treasurer's computer.
 - The payroll service keeps federal, state and local tax returns for four years, and also payroll journals, summaries and third-party sick pay for three years.

- The district is seeking duplicate copies of its legal records from its former attorney, and when they are received intends to microfilm them.

IV. STREAMLINING CURRENT RECORD MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

Since 1997 New York State has allowed local governments to maintain electronic records in place of paper or microfilmed records, as long as officials can ensure their electronic records are not rendered unusable because of changing technology before their retention and preservation requirements are met.

In North Greece, paper records (and subsequently microfilmed records) are the official district records. Now, however, the district is in a position, in many instances, to have electronic records be official records. From a practical standpoint, having electronic incident reports as official records would be especially advantageous for North Greece because they constitute the biggest records component for the district.

Today North Greece is well positioned to take full advantage of electronic incident record keeping, and reduce future microfilming costs. In recent years the district has added an IT specialist to its staff, and all incident reports back to 2001 are in electronic format.

CGR found that both the Henrietta Fire District and Brighton Fire Districts, two districts with comparable records issues, have already opted for electronic incident reports for permanent records.

- ❖ The Henrietta Fire District has all incidents back to 1993 available via computer. It also maintains a hand-generated radio log (e.g., date, date of incident, station reporting, incident number, dispatcher), listing 18 incidents per sheet. Radio log information is kept permanently. In addition, incident report sheets (dispatcher's notes) are kept permanently. But the vast majority of paper records generated for incidents – “about 90%” – are destroyed after seven years, according to the Chief. Actual fires where “we need to really keep those records” account for only about 10% of total incident records, he added.
- ❖ The Brighton Fire District has maintained its incident records electronically for many years. The district backs up its

electronic system and will migrate the information whenever new technology is adopted in the future. The district does store its paper-based daily log, but only for a period of 10 years.

- ❖ The Rochester Fire Department is changing to an electronic incident reporting system in 2005 but currently has a paper-based incident reporting system. The department responds to 29,000 incident calls annually, but retains, on a permanent basis, only incident records related to structural fires. There are typically about 1,000 such incidents a year. Other incident records are maintained for three years and then destroyed.

The district station logs, along with current electronic records, could be combined to meet SARA requirements re: incident reports in the future.

Like its counterparts in Henrietta and Brighton, North Greece keeps a hand-generated log of calls at its station and tracks calls, vehicle(s) responding, briefly describes the nature of calls, and identifies firefighters and EMTs responding. These station logs, along with the current electronic records, could be combined to meet SARA requirements going forward. This would be a particularly cost-effective, efficient solution for the district. It would also be an especially secure approach for the district once the second server is operational at the 645 North Greece Road fire station. CGR strongly recommends this approach, especially since the district has an IT specialist on site and plans to maintain (and back up) electronic records, migrating records to new technology as such technology is acquired in the future.

However, if North Greece officials are not comfortable with having incidents kept electronically for the long term, another option is to consider a more aggressive “weeding” program of paper incident records. The district already maintains its station logs on a permanent basis. As a result, it could safely eliminate routine incident reports, including most EMS reports and service calls (which together constitute about 90% of incident records) after seven years (or some records in fewer years if the district wants to do periodic weeding per the MU-I schedule). Routine records that must be kept longer than seven years, for example a medical transport involving a young child, could be flagged at the time they are put into the headquarters records room.

If the district adopts the more aggressive weeding option, it is our recommendation that North Greece put on microfilm only its most important incident records (e.g., fires, sites with chronic problems).

Storing paper records for periods up to seven years, should not present a significant obstacle since the North Greece Road station, which also has a SARA-approved records room, has opened.

A third option is to maintain the current system of microfilming incident records. This option would be applicable if the district is not comfortable with electronic record keeping and finds weeding records more costly than the current process of microfilming all incident reports.

V. ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ Now that a second records room exists outside headquarters, North Greece could also take the following steps:
 - Make backup copies of key policies and procedures and store them in the new records facility.
 - Consider whether to duplicate personnel files on a periodic basis and store them securely in the new records room. These records will not be needed on Day 1 of any disaster, but are likely to be needed within a short period thereafter, per the district RMO.
 - Decide whether to store, on an annual basis, service award benefits plan points for the North Greece Fire Department, since this is a unique record kept by the district secretary.
 - Consider developing an election procedures information guide and storing a backup copy at the new facility.
- ❖ If the district decides to adopt electronic records as official records, revisit the MU-I schedule and determine if other

records, other than incident records, can also be maintained effectively in this format – further reducing future record-keeping costs.

- ❖ Revisit putting all treasurer’s records on the server, with access password protected. The CFO is not comfortable having personnel information (e.g., social security numbers, pay rates) on the server, but it is possible to do so safely, and this approach can be reconsidered at some point in the future. (Note: in the meantime the CFO has adopted CGR’s recommendation that files maintained only on his standalone computer be duplicated regularly and kept in a secure off-site location, rather than at his residence.)
- ❖ Avoid storing the headquarters server’s tape backup in the same room as the server. Ideally the tape should be stored off-site. If it is not practical to do so daily, at least a weekly tape should be stored at the new station on North Greece Road. (Note: when the “slave server” at the second station becomes operational, the district can then create daily tapes at both locations, and store them in separate rooms from the servers in the stations. Be aware that storing media in fireproof cabinets or media boxes will not protect them.)
- ❖ Do not store supplies in the headquarters records room, but keep the room strictly for records. Also, keep the records room locked at all times, with only authorized access, since there are paper records in storage containing confidential information.
- ❖ Per SARA guidelines, it is recommended that the district eliminate the carpet in the headquarters records room.
- ❖ Consider putting the district’s historical records in archival storage boxes, rather than standard storage boxes.
- ❖ Label historical records, and any permanent records considered essential that are not already backed up on microfilm, with reflective labels, for easy identification following a disaster.

Avoid storing the headquarters server’s tape backup in the same room as the server.

VI. IF A DISASTER DOES OCCUR AND RECORDS ARE AT RISK

CGR recommends the following initial steps, in accordance with SARA guidelines:

- Using the contact list that appears later in this report, call the SARA regional advisory officer as soon as possible.
- Once headquarters is safe to enter, try to stabilize the temperature at about 65 degrees and the humidity between 45 and 55 percent.
- If an area is flooded or has high levels of humidity, reduce the temperature further to delay the onset of mold infestation. Mold can grow within 48 hours. Remove standing water as soon as possible.
- Take photographs to document damage, then develop a salvage strategy. Someone (preferably the CFO) should call the insurance company.
- Take steps to ensure vital or historical records are moved to a safe area (the reflective labels noted earlier will be extremely helpful in identifying these records). SARA refers to salvage as “essentially a process of triage.”
- If records are wet or fire-damaged, wear rubber gloves and face masks. If the air quality is poor, wear protective clothing and use breathing apparatus.
- If the disaster is a flood or fire, the district may need to call a fumigator to remove lingering odors and mold.
- In the event the main office building is destroyed due to explosion or other cause, the district will be able to maintain critical operations and rely on essential records stored at other locations (including tape backups), as identified earlier in this report.

SARA has developed a step-by-step process for recovering wet paper records.

To help the district in the event of a disaster, CGR also provides the following information on step-by-step recovery of wet records, developed from SARA's 2004 publication, "Preparing for the Worst: Managing Records Disasters"

- First, salvage any records threatened with further damage because they are under water or about to fall.
- Immediately reduce temperature and humidity levels in wet or humid storage areas, and set up fans, air conditioners, and dehumidifiers to help dry out these areas.
- If some records boxes are temporarily falling apart, temporarily store their contents in plastic crates to keep them neat and under control. Use cardboard boxes if you don't have plastic crates, then move the reboxed records to a dry, sheltered area. Never leave wet records to dry on their own, and do not leave them in an area with standing water, high humidity levels, or mold growth.
- To remedy damage to the records, move them to a cold, dry environment. If a large quantity of records is involved, check with school districts, supermarkets, or businesses to see whether space is available in an industrial-size freezer for temporary storage. Then contact a vendor that specializes in freeze-drying records to extract moisture completely.
- If dealing with a small quantity of records, dry them using the appropriate method listed below:
 - *Damp, coated or uncoated paper:* Fan pages open, insert blotter paper, and position them under a fan so air circulates between the leaves.
 - *Wet, uncoated paper:* Interleave pages with a paper towel or blank newsprint until damp, then remove the interleaving and proceed as above.
 - *Wet, coated paper:* Interleave pages with waxed paper, then fan open, and proceed as for wet, uncoated paper.
 - *Photographs:* Rinse in clear, cold water. Dry them face-up on a blotter or hang them on a laundry line.

Once dried, place the records in new cartons. Label the boxes with records series titles, dates, and retention periods so that you know what each box contains.

VII. CONTACT NAMES IN THE EVENT OF A DISASTER

SARA

Gail Fischer

State Archives Regional Advisory Officer

Ph: 585-241-2827

Ph: 585-461-1212 (home)

(Note: in the event of disaster, emergency grant funds are available but she needs to be notified ASAP)

*Review contact names
annually and update as
needed.*

Government Records Services in Albany

Ph: 518-474-6926

John Haines

NYS Mycologist

Ph: 518-474-5809

Insurance

Gary Johnson

Churchville Agency, Inc.

16 South Main St.

Churchville, NY

Ph: 585-293-2565

Fax: 585-293-3519

Policies:

Liability - Policy CPP2122333 Utica National Insurance

AD&D - Provident Life and Casualty Policy DCC-49220

Note: polices cover for replacement cost of vehicles and buildings

Auditor

Gary G. Krauss, CPA, P.C.

1851 Stone Road

Suite 102

Rochester, NY 14615

Ph: 585-865-2420

Fax: 585-865-5982

Payroll Services

Account #: 0017-B866

PAYCHEX, INC.

105 Despatch Dr.

Suite One

E. Rochester, NY 14445

Attn: Caroline Adams
Ph: 585-218-5100 ext. 85128

Legal Counsel
Ray DiRaddo
2725 Dewey Ave
Rochester, NY 14616
Ph: 585-865-5750

Workman's Compensation
Work Comp and VFBL – PERMA
9 Cornell Road
Latham, NY 12110

Contact:
Marcia Hart
Ph: 518-220-1111 ext. 3028

VIII. EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

In addition to fire extinguishers, SARA recommends the following emergency equipment and supplies for a disaster. NHA should determine which items to keep on hand and which to identify outside sources for in order to contact them in an emergency.

- Freezer space
- Drying space
- Dehumidifiers
- Fans
- Pallets
- Plastic sheeting
- Duct tape
- Portable sump pump
- Wet-dry vacuum

- Unprinted newspaper
- Plastic trash cans
- Plastic trash bags
- Plastic crates
- Rubber gloves
- Protective clothing
- Respirators
- First-aid kit
- Paper towels
- Fumigation supplies
- Forklift
- Refrigerator

CGR recommends the district copy the sections of this report entitled “If a Disaster Does Occur and Records Are at Risk” and “SARA Step-by-Step Recovery of Wet Records” and include them in the district emergency plan, along with the contact list in this report.