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# **Assessing the Potential for Disaster and Quiet Catastrophes**

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**Cornell University**



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***“Books have the same enemies as people:  
fire, humidity, animals, weather, and their  
own content.” Paul Valery***



# Fire



# Georgetown library fire, 2007

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**"This has always been my worst nightmare. I've always feared this would happen," said Jerry McCoy, a librarian and archivist of the Peabody Room. "I've always thought: If there was a fire, what would I grab first?"**



# Major causes of fires in libraries

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- Arson
- Renovation



# Fire damage

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- **Water**
- **Soot**
- **Destruction of library materials**





# Fire suppression system

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- **Detection**
- **Notification**
- **Suppression**



# Types of fire detectors

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- **Photoelectric**
- **Ionization**
- **Heat**
- **Manual**



# Notification

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- **Automatic**
  
- **Manual**



# Types of fire suppression

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- **Gaseous**
- **Sprinkler**
  - Wet pipe
  - Dry pipe
  - Mist
- **Extinguishers**



# Sprinkler system requirements

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- **Reliable source of clean water**
- **Sufficient water pressure**
- **Good quality pipes**



# Benefits of suppression systems

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- **Connected to an alarm**
- **Always on duty**
- **Early detection and containment**
- **Reduced insurance premiums**



# Eliminate fire risks

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- **Awareness of building construction and renovation**
- **Fire-resistant storage**
- **Internal barriers (fire doors and fire walls)**
- **Fire system planning**
  - Evacuation plan
  - Disaster plan



# Risk assessment

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- Hire fire safety engineer
- Invite local fire inspector



# Water/humidity

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- **Faulty HVAC system**
- **Plumbing**
- **Insufficient environmental control**
- **External forces**



# Plumbing and HVAC systems



# Potential leakage points

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- **“Wet pipe” sprinkler systems**
- **Damaged sprinkler heads**
- **Interior plumbing**
- **Asbestos abatement**







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# Weather

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- **Tornadoes**
- **Hurricanes**
- **Flooding**





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# Poor environmental control

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- Humidity (too high/too low)
- Temperature (too high)



# Drop boxes



# Animals

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- **Vermin**
- **Bedbugs**
- **Dogs**



# Insects

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- **Local libraries struggle with bedbugs (Ohio)**
- **Libraries work to get rid of bedbugs (Maryland)**
- **Bed Bugs Found at NYC Library, Officials Say Problem Contained**
- **Bed Bugs Hitch Ride On Books, Prompt Library Fumigation (Colorado)**
  - Rare Book Lover Banned From Library





# Dogs



# Mice



# Threats to content

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- **Theft**
- **Vandalism**
- **Censorship**



# Some recent headlines

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- **Harvard Vandals Douse Gay-Issues Books With Pee, 2010**
- **Brazen vandals target public library (urinating on books)**
- **Fayetteville-Manlius High School library vandalized, 2010**
- **Warrant issued in sticky library vandalism case in Ada County**





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# Things to assess

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- **Planning (disaster, fire, evacuation)**
- **Internal environment**
- **Security**



# Afternoon

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- **Types of deterioration**
- **Planning**
- **Panel discussion**



# Questions?

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