



It's Just Around the Corner— **WINTERIZE** Your Cultural Organization!

Photo courtesy of Rebecca Torsell.

By Tom Claeson, Senior
Consultant for Digital &
Preservation Services, LYRASIS

The winter of 2013-14 was one of the toughest many of us can remember—bitter cold, heavy snow in many areas, and high winds causing blowing and drifting. Hopefully, not every winter will be as bad, but there are many things we can do to help protect our organizations from disaster and damage caused by harsh winter weather.

There are a number of areas of your building to watch come wintertime. Your roof and basement deserve regular monitoring. Sometimes, pest management in your building can be just as bad in the winter as in the summer, because insects and animals may use your building to come in from the cold. Frozen pipes can be a problem. And, you need to watch your thermostat and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system just as closely in the cold season as you do in summertime.

Starting from the top of your building, you need to know the weight-bearing load of your roof, and how much snow it can take. Be especially careful to monitor during heavy/wet snows, which might exceed the load-bearing capacity of your roof. This is especially important for buildings with flat roofs or those with low pitches. Ice dams may form when snow moves down from heated areas on the roof to unheated patches, where it re-freezes and can force water under shingles and into ceilings or walls. Some organizations are using ice melt socks which can be placed on a roof to protect against these incursions. Finally, do not use snow blowers on the roof of your building, which could cut wires or rupture pipes they come in contact with.

In freezing conditions, water may find its way into basements that are normally

dry, especially if the ground outside your building is frozen or there is ice on it. Under these conditions, water has a difficult time evaporating, so it will sink into the ground and may come into your facility. As usual, to prevent disasters, all collection materials should be at least 4-6 inches off the floor. You can prevent the need for disaster salvage by making sure even non-collections materials—such as supplies and boxes—are off the floor level of your basement. Consider installing a water/moisture alarm on the floor of your basement level. Finally, especially if the water table or runoff patterns in your area is above the foundation of your building, have a sump pump and hoses available, or know where you can get them (equipment rental centers, etc.).

Rodents and some insects may come indoors during the fall and stay until spring, because they want to stay warm and be near food and water sources. Staff and housekeepers at your organization should monitor for evidence of insect or rodent holes, bedding, and droppings—especially inspect your storage areas. Close areas of entry including sealing cracks, inspecting door sweeps, closing areas around pipes and siding, and above stone foundations. You can check for air leaks and drafts by standing next to window or door openings to feel if cold air is blowing through. Also, consider cutting back or removing foliage near your foundation—it can provide hiding places for pests.

Pipes in unoccupied buildings or unheated areas (attics, ceilings, crawlspaces, mudrooms, sheds, and outbuildings) should be drained. Insulate pipes in exterior wall and monitor them for freezing. And during extreme cold, consider leaving cabinet drawers under sinks open if they are on an exterior wall.

As we know, temperature needs to be controlled year-around. Stability and consistency is vital. If your organization is in use during the winter, maintain stable temperatures to protect collections from fluctuations. If you reduce heat in any building or part of your structure during the winter, gradually raise it over several weeks once you reopen, so that collection materials can acclimatize—otherwise you may be dealing with large amounts of condensation. And remember to balance staff/visitor needs with energy savings. Cold is good for materials, but not as good for staff and patrons, so don't lower temperatures to a point where it is painful to work in or visit your facility.

If you decide to make environmental modifications (such as humidifiers), it is smart to consult an HVAC engineer first. A smart addition to your building is adding insulation to attic and walls. Check to see if your utility provider offers rebates for energy-efficient building improvements such as adding insulation or replacing windows.

A few final steps to prevent winter disaster damage: If you can stay safe outside, a walk around the exterior of your building to note problems can prevent building damage and leaks. Be sure to have telephone numbers for all utility companies close at hand, and have disaster recovery companies on speed-dial! And, report inclement conditions or building and collection damage to state and association listservs to warn colleagues.

Note: Portions of the information in this article were developed by Kim Andrews, formerly of the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) in Philadelphia.