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Awareness of Archives in Japan

(1/2)

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Fire in Archives! What do you do? - To prepare Disaster Plans through a Test Fire experience made by the Japan Society of Archives Institutions

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Presentations:

1. Video show "Fire! What do you do?" records of the test-fire program for archivists and librarians by the Disaster Prevention Committee of Japan Society of Archives institutions

1. The Japan Society of Archives Institutions and disaster prevention training

The Japan Society of Archives Institutions (JSAI) is constituted by participation of Historical Materials preservation organizations all over the country, the documentation management person in charge of administration, etc.

JISA shall aim at preventing historically important archives and other records from losing and disappearing, and shall transmit and preserve them as the common property of the people for our next generations.

The aim of JSAI is to keep members informed and offer communication opportunities to one another to promote the activities of archives preservation and use through various discussions and studies.

Archives institutions such as historical archives, government archives on various levels, historical museums, historical compilation divisions of local governments are the examples of the institutional members.

All the individual members are involved in the work to preserve and use historically important archives.

JASA is a category B member of ICA and EASTICA, the East Asian Regional Branch of ICA, to give members more exchange opportunities with foreign countries.

It is called "Zen Shiryo Kyo" in Japanese.

The Hanshin-Awaji Big Earthquake on January 17, 1995 did serious damage to libraries and museums including archives.

JSAI had recognized the necessity to take the disaster measures to archives and established the Disaster Prevention Committee in April 1995.

The disaster prevention committee decided to apply the disaster measures to archives.

The disaster prevention committee made a guidance to handle disaster measures archives.

Moreover the disaster prevention committee has built up the networks among archives for the mutual help and support at the time of disaster.

The disaster prevention committee has been hosting the study session to handle damaged records and data for the staff members of the library who usually treat data and books.

The purpose of the study session is to learn the fundamental knowledge on how to take emergency measures to the documents and data damaged by the flood or fire.

Major participants to this study session are those who are treating documents and data at government offices, archives, museums and so on.

When the archives and books which we keep and handle every day are damaged by fire, what should we do or what policies should we take?

And what should we pay attention to in our daily operations?

We thought, "If we actually experience the cases that will possibly happen at the time of disaster, we will learn what we should do."

We held the disaster prevention study session on January 29th, 1999.
60 persons participated.

The participants observed the process from putting fire and extinguishing and learned possible emergency measures to the damaged data and put them into practice.

Of course this experiment is largely different from the actual fire.

Our mental attitude is also different, because we knew it was an experiment.

But this combustion experiment gave us a kind of impact. We learned what we can not get from the paper or the study on the desk.

We took a video of the experiment and made this tape.

We also made a report entitled “What do you do when the data burned?” based on this combustion experiment.

The disaster prevention committee changed its to the historical materials preservation committee on April 2001 and has been working till today.

2 Experiment:

(1) From ignition to extinguish of fire

In this combustion experiment, we actually burned several different groups of data and observed how they were damaged and we learned following things.

1 How do they burn? Official documents, books, films, and magnetic disks?

2 How does the combustion change according to the placement position on a book shelf, keeping methods and so on?

3 How does the combustion change by the materials of the data?

4 Process from the ignition to the combustion.

(2) We have prepared three steel book shelves and data.

1 The book shelf is 1.8m high, 0.8m wide, and 0.3m deep.

We placed data on shelf A and B.

2 We have prepared following data for the experiment.

Book Shelf A: documents and documents in carton box, microfilms

Book Shelf B: books(paperback, pocket book, hard covered book), magnetic tape, floppy disk

3 Setting conditions of Book Shelf A

On the upper step:

We placed 13 different size of documents files horizontally.

On the second step:

We placed documents files vertically and tightly.

On the third step:

We placed documents files in a carton box and 6 volumes of documents horizontally.

On the fourth step:

We place 5 files, documents tied with 2 files by string.

We put the microfilm on the center of the fourth step.

Conditions of microfilms are films themselves, films in the paper box and films in the can.

4 Book Shelf B

On the upper step:

We placed 10 paperbacks vertically on the center of the step and to their right side we put paperbacks and magazines horizontally. To the left side, we put magnetic disks, compact disks, floppy disks, video tapes.

On the second step:

We put 30 volumes of documents to the left side and 10 volumes of booklets to the right side.

On the third step:

We placed 4 photo albums horizontally to the left side and 4 comic magazines vertically, 10 magazines horizontally. We place cassette tapes on the photo albums.

On the fourth step:

We put 30 volumes of booklets and the newspapers horizontally.

5 We located the Book Shelf C to the left side by reversing its back to the front.

This Book Shelf C contains nothing.

We placed an oil pan under book shelves. We put 10 liters of kerosene for 10 minutes combustion.

The oil pan is 1m long, 1m wide and 50cm deep.

3 Combustion Experiment in Photos:

(1) Immediately after the ignition, combustion flame covered the whole book shelf A and B.

After few seconds, the central part of the book shelf raised spiral flame and began to burn extremely.

In one minute, it reached to the remarkable level of combustion.

Fire power became terribly strong. It was much stronger than we expected.

So we have to change the combustion time significantly shorter from the planned 10 minutes.

After 2 minutes from the ignition, the chairman of the committee issued an order to extinguish the fire.

Out looking of the whole group of data turned deep-black in these two minutes.

(2) We extinguished the fire by misty water of the indoor fire hose.

The flame disappeared soon.

(3) The every surface of the group of the data was burned to black at every step of the book shelf.

But the inside of the data and the date placed in the mid or back were not burned.

The group of data packed tightly was not easily burned.

We also experienced the accident that once extinguished back of the book shelf generated the fire again.

The newspapers and magazines which use low quality papers burned almost same way.

4 Let us see the video.

5 Participants in this study session expressed their impressions, " We felt a big impact, because we could directly observe how the books and data burned in front of us."

Taking part in this kind of combustion experiment for the first time, participants have realized the importance and difficulties of their mission to preserve and protect the documents and data they possess.

The knowledge on the disaster prevention at the libraries and museums including archives still remains logical and study level not practical level.

The study and research on the preservation and restoration of damaged data are not sufficient at

present.

6 We learned lessons of the Hanshin-Awaji Big Earthquake and introduced new ideas on the disaster prevention. What we have experienced through this experiment: the speed of fire spreading, how paper and plastics burned. They were all surprising to us.

(1)Lessons of Hansin-Awaji Big Earthquake

Those who engaged in the preservation and restoration of damaged data by the Hanshin-Awaji Big Earthquake.

1 Grasp the locating conditions and weak points of the building beforehand. Based on those information, decide the room design such as working and storage room and fixtures.

2 It's better to take protection measures, such as putting in a preservation box.

3 In addition to take preservation measures, in case of very important data it is recommended to make copies of them and keep at different place.

4 Safety of visitors are truly important. But that of staff members are also important as well.

5 Building of network among similar organizations is important. Having frequent communication among network members are also important as well.

(2)It is important to build up the relation to help and visit each other and extend needy hands in the case of disaster.

We have built up the network also with the local possessor of important data and documents.

We should have the awareness that a disaster will happen some day and to have readiness to exercise every possible measures to make the damages minimum.

(3)We should know what we can do prior to the happening of a disaster and what we should do when it happened.

If we can share the lessons of disasters over the generation, we can surely make an effective disaster prevention plan.

One of the most important role of us who engaged in the preservation work of documents and

data is to record the disasters and talk about the memories of the disasters and transmit to our next generations.