



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 27, 2011

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State Historical Society offers disaster preparedness advice

PIERRE, S.D. -- In 2005 the Heritage Health Index reported that few cultural heritage institutions have disasters plans or that the plans are outdated. Every year on May 1st, historical societies, archives, museums, libraries are encouraged to spend some time preparing their organization for a disaster.

"It's easy to postpone working on a disaster plan when we're so engrossed in our daily activities, but if we dedicate time on May 1st to do a few actions that may make a difference if an emergency does happen," said Chelle Somsen, State Archivist for the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. "Updating the contact list, asking staff review to the disaster plan, checking to make sure the fire extinguishers and smoke detectors are working, and making sure all the collections are off the floor and not blocking exits are a few ideas of actions that can take place on May Day."

This year the State Historical Society-Archives staff will update their pocket response plans and perform an inventory of disaster supplies on May Day. All State Historical Society staff will also partake in fire extinguisher training.

"These are actions that we can take without the whole process becoming overwhelming," Somsen said.

If an organization needs assistance with preparing a disaster plan they are encouraged to contact the State Archives at (605) 773-3804 or archref@state.sd.us

The archives is open Monday through Friday and the first Saturday of each month from 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. CDT.

The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council, and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society's world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit www.history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.