

Survival plan: Group aims to preserve Coachella Valley history after earthquake or fire

Kate McGinty, Palm Springs Desert Sun, 8-19-10

A half-dozen historical societies and museums have signed what one group called an “unprecedented agreement” that could save historical artifacts and documents after an earthquake or wildfire.

The mutual aid agreements have been signed by about half of the 15 groups that have banded together as the Coachella Valley Emergency Preparedness Network.

Under the agreements, the museums and historical societies promise to lend experts, such as curators or a cultural resources coordinator, to help preserve items after a catastrophe.

“This unprecedented agreement will help safeguard irreplaceable artifacts and the historic records and relics of the Coachella Valley during a wildfire, earthquake or similar disaster,” said Robert Martin, chairman of Morongo Band of Mission Indians, which signed the agreement late last week.

“This is a natural continuation of our ongoing commitment to help our neighbors and our region during times of need.”

Members of the network, which was first launched two years ago, also pitch in to buy shared emergency equipment and supplies including boxes, gloves and protective plastic sheets.

The Coachella Valley Emergency Preparedness Network has also applied for grant money and solicited donations.

This kind of preparation could be key to saving historical documents or cultural artifacts that are on display throughout the valley, network Chairwoman Ginger Ridgway said.

“A lot of these are the original documents, and if they're damaged or destroyed, they're gone and that information is gone with them. They're just not replaceable. That's why they're in a museum,” she said.

The 15-member network — that features historical societies, museums and The Living Desert zoo and botanical park — has a long wish list of supplies it hopes to collect as the network expands.

“Each organization can't put up \$15,000 for extra supplies — or even half that — so this works well,” Ridgway said. “We just need to get the supplies.”