

Safeguarding the Charters of Freedom from Nuclear Attack: Symbolic and Functional Planning



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Context

The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights are collectively known as the “**Charters of Freedom**.” During the Post-Cuban Missile Crisis Cold War Era (1962 – 1979), the nation was on high alert regarding the constant threat of nuclear attack. The Archivist of the United States approached the National Research Council (NRC) in 1975 to express concerns about existing procedures for safeguarding these important documents and solicit feedback. In May 1975, the NRC, under the auspices of the Advisory Committee on Civil Defense, called an *ad hoc* meeting to review background material and consider options available for maintaining and increasing security of the Charters of Freedom. This poster is based on research conducted using the donated papers of Dr. Charles Fritz (who participated in the working group), which are currently housed in the E.L. Quarantelli Resource Collection at the University of Delaware’s Disaster Research Center.

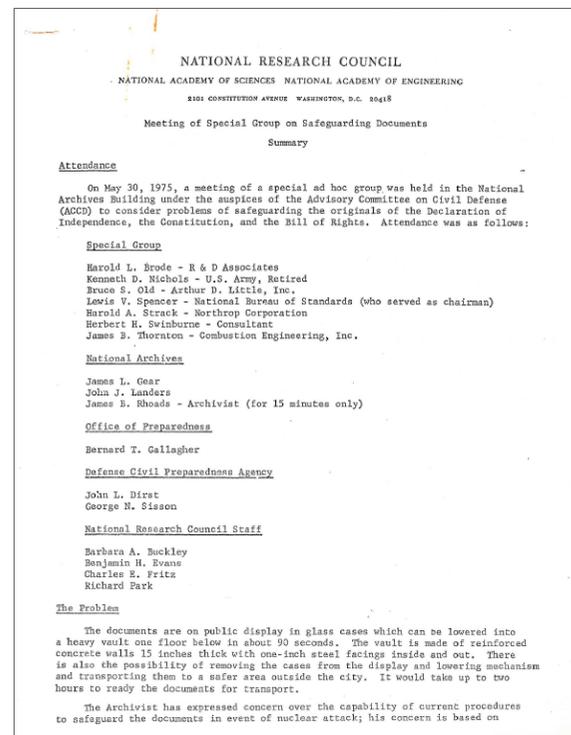
Conclusions of the Working Group

Each organization came to the table with their own perspectives and interests. Ultimately, while there were clearly numerous points of divergence, these organizations were able to come to consensus on several important points:

- Need for cost-effectiveness studies on special topics:
 - Strengthening documents’ present vault and equipment;
 - Construction of a deep underground space under Archives Building;
 - Developing optical viewing system of documents while in safe position at Archives Building;
 - Desirability of transport of documents to safe, secure area outside the city;
 - Applicability of these considerations to other documents.
- Need for continuous training and practice for the personnel who would perform emergency action.
- Need to key procedures for removing documents from public display to low risk area outside the city to one of the Defense Readiness Conditions (e.g. DEFCON 3).

Concerns and Solutions

Point of Concern	Proposed Solutions by Working Group
Documents vulnerable during transit.	Working Group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given sufficient lead time, conventional / existing transportation process is adequate. Dr. Spencer (<i>National Bureau of Standards</i>): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helicopter removal suitable only to threats with warning periods of a day in length. • Store high priority documents separately from other Archives documents to ensure removal of high priority volumes is rapid and inconspicuous.
Integrity of vault would be compromised in a post-multi-megaton, close-in explosion. Would be wrecked to allow entry of water and heat.	Working Group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dig deep shaft under Archives Building to receive sealed container holding the documents with remote optical viewing system • Strengthen vault and equipment. Dr. Hall (<i>University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign</i>): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present vault system may be adequate. • If determined by government that should remain in current location, evaluate the adequacy of present protection. If determined that should be moved, evaluate new facility, location, logistic details, costs, etc.
Current equipment does not provide adequate protection from sabotage and vandalism. Documents vulnerable in public view.	Working Group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need immediate quick-fix for reducing danger from sabotage. • A remote optical viewing system for the public. • Should replace original documents with facsimiles (so-labeled). Store originals in safe place in non-target area not accessible to public. This is a policy decision that must be made by the government. Dr. Hall (<i>University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign</i>): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of original documents may not be desirable. • Keep original documents in public view. Make several copies to be stored throughout the U.S. • Move documents to an interior location in the U.S. with only copies housed in Washington, D.C. Mr. Newman (<i>Tishman Research Corporation</i>): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place special documents in adequate vault not accessible to public. Display authentic reproduction. Dr. Spencer (<i>National Bureau of Standards</i>): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change vault control mechanism to require switch elsewhere in Archives Building to be thrown before documents could be returned to viewing position after removal. • Does not favor permanent removal of documents from public view with use of facsimiles for public display. Facsimile replacement should be keyed to appropriate DEFCON level.
Timing of procedures for protection / movement of documents.	Working Group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures for removal from public display to low risk area outside Washington, DC should be keyed to a Defense Readiness Condition (ex: DEFCON 3)



National Research Council Summary. Credit: E.L. Quarantelli Resource Collection



Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom. Credit: National Archives and Records Administration.

1975 Safeguards:

Option 1: Use of 55-ton steel and concrete “Charters Vault” constructed in 1953. Each night after building closed, display case lowered into a heavy vault one floor below in about 90 seconds. Vault is made of reinforced concrete walls 15-inches thick with 1-inch steel facings inside and out.

Option 2: Charters of Freedom display cases removed from the display and transported to an underground facility outside Washington, DC. It would take up to 2 hours to prepare documents for transport. A second group of papers would leave via truck after Charters of Freedom have reached safety.

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Analysis

Although individuals participate in emergency planning activities, the organizations these individuals represent are key actors in decision-making. Clarke (2001) identifies two main types of planning that organizations often undertake. **Functional Planning**, “when actors have meaningful history to draw on” and “some reasonable probability” that their plans will succeed, and **Symbolic Planning**, which produces “rhetorical instruments that have political utility in reducing uncertainty for organizations and experts.” Both types of planning are illustrated in the documents we studied.

As an example, during the course of discussions, working group members identified that the scale model of vault lowering mechanisms on public display at the time could potentially be used as tool for sabotage. This, the working group decided, was a more practical, every day threat than that of nuclear attack.

Plans to assess and manage the threat of sabotage are representative of Functional Planning, whereas much higher levels of uncertainty in the original discussion of nuclear attack caused this discussion, in practice, to become an example of Symbolic Planning.

NRC Working Group

NRC Working Group:

- Subject matter experts
 - R & D Associates
 - US Army
 - Arthur D. Little, Inc.
 - National Bureau of Standards
 - Northrop Corporation
 - Combustion Engineering, Inc.
 - Tishman Research Corporation
- National Archives and Records Administration, including the Archivist of the United States
- Office of Preparedness
- Defense Civil Preparedness Agency
- NRC - Advisory Committee on Civil Defense