

City clerk: May Day is a good day to get organized

By **STACI GUY**
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While the term May Day can reference the arrival of spring or even a distress signal, Assistant City Clerk Lisa Johnston is urging people to use May Day for a little bit of both — to get their important documents organized and in order in case disaster strikes.

Much like using the “spring forward” time change to remember to change the batteries in smoke detectors, Johnston said May 1 is a good day to get organized and prepare for any type of disaster; something she said many libraries, museums and other archival institutions practice annually.

May Day preparations, however, are not something that should be limited to places that house important archives, Johnston said. Businesses and even households that contain important documents should prepare as well.

“For any documents that are important to you, such as birth certificates, Social Security cards, car titles and family photos, take tomorrow to get them in order and all in one place,” she suggests.

Johnston said she recommends purchasing a lidded plastic container or a portable file folder of some sort to store the important documents and photos, making it easy to grab on the way out of the house or business should any type of disaster occur. After placing the items in a container, she said it is important to keep them off the floor and says to avoid stor-



Staci Guy photo

Assistant City Clerk Lisa Johnston visually inspects a copy of important city documents that were saved on a roll of microfilm as part of her May Day disaster planning. The original microfilms, she said, are stored in a state-of-the-art facility at the Department of Records and Archives in Santa Fe.

ing them in the attic (due to extreme heat) or in the basement (due to flooding) if at all possible.

“Disasters can come in all forms,” she said. “Not just natural disasters like tornadoes, but fires, floods from a toilet left running all weekend or even an unexpected death of the person in the family who typically does the organizing.”

For important city documents and permanent records, such as minutes from city council meetings, city ordinances and resolutions, Johnston said they routinely microfilm such documents and send the microfilm to the State Records and Archives Department in Santa Fe, who has a state-of-the-art storage facility for microfilms.

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"The council has been very forward thinking in allowing us to have a micro-imaging program as well and we have now begun imaging the documents in addition to micro-filming," she added.

Other than keeping important documents in a labeled plastic container, the following is a list of additional things one can do on May Day to make sure they are prepared for a disaster:

- Have a disaster plan in order and up to date.

The American Red Cross suggests meeting with your family or co-workers to discuss why you need to prepare for a disaster, what types of disasters are likely to occur in your area and what to do in case one happens.

An online tool that Johnston said she has found helpful is dPlan, a free online tool that helps simplify the process of writing a disaster plan.

The dPlan generates a printed disaster plan and contains contact information for staff, family members and key personnel. It also provides preventative maintenance checklists and salvage techniques.

The dPlan is stored on the Internet and that way, she said,

if you need to access it and you can't get to your computer, it can still be accessed via the Internet at any computer.

- Have a month's supply of medicine in a zip-lock bag and stock your pantry with non-perishables and bottled water.

- Get to know your local firefighters and police.

Business owners should invite them to tour the facility and give pointers on safety and preparedness.

- Make an evacuation plan and contact family in case you need to leave the area.

- Identify the three biggest risks to your collection or building, such as a power failure or leaking water line, and outline steps to mitigate them.

"Even walking around the building to see if the roof is leaking above important documents will help," she said.

- Eliminate hazards such as storage in hallways and blocked fire exits.

- Join forces with nearby businesses or homeowners and agree to assist one another in case of disaster.

Johnston said it is a good idea for business owners especially to not only back up their computers, but to store the copy at another location.

"If you are a business owner and your neighbor is a business owner, back up your computers, take them home and swap them," she suggests. "That way, if something does happen, your backup is still safe."

- One of the most important things to remember in planning for a disaster is to make sure everyone in a family or business knows what to grab and where it is located.

Johnston said preparing for a disaster is important and doing just one thing can make a difference.

"The idea is for us to take that one day and prepare for anything," Johnston said. "Just start putting it together and do at least one thing, even if it is as simple as walking around the building or house to check for a leaky roof and moving the documents away from that area."