

The Environmental and Psychological Aspects of EMCOM Workers in Disaster Support

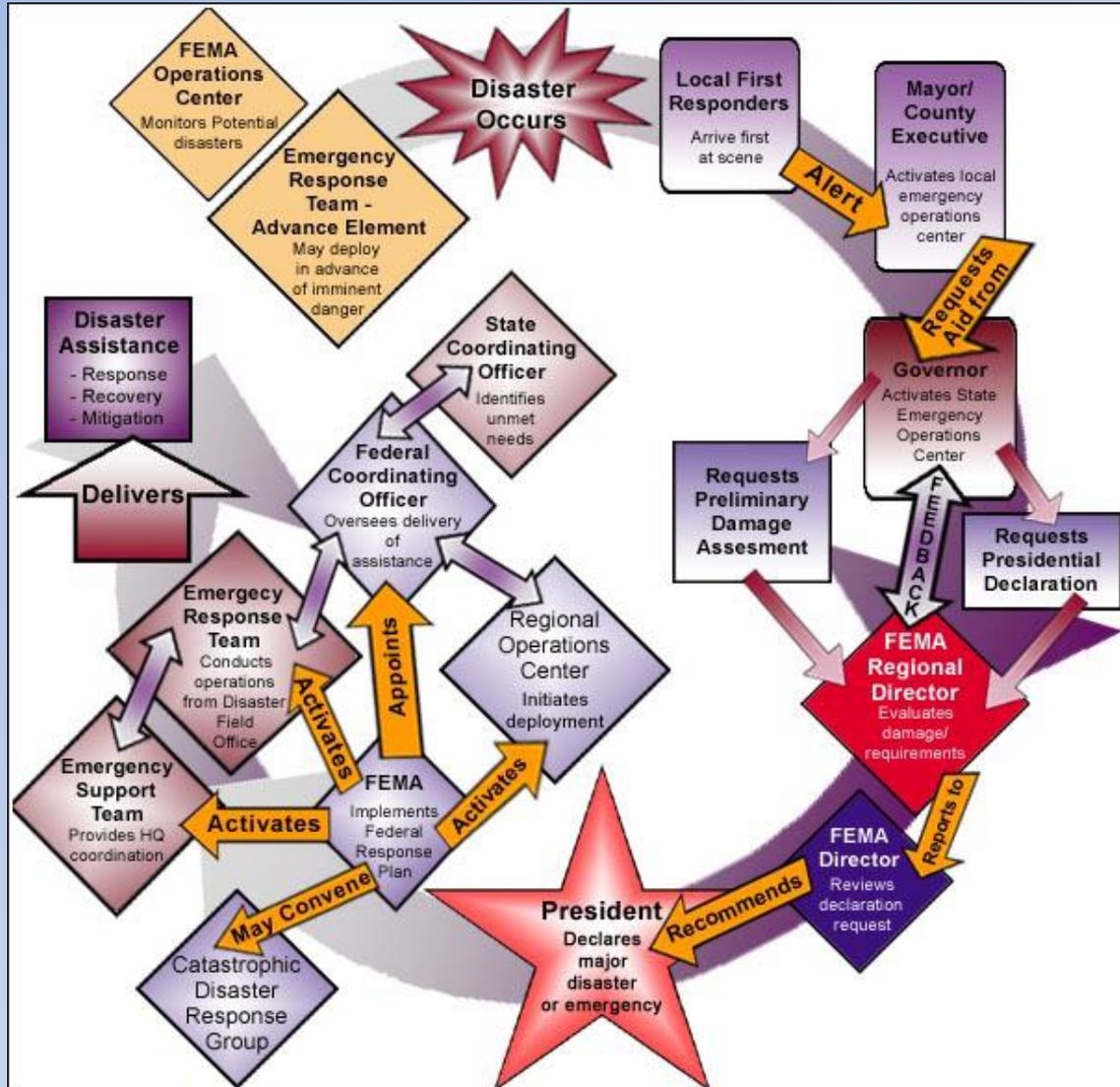
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Disasters Happen



Disaster Response Happens



Learning Objectives

- To learn about:
 - The Disaster Environment
 - The Disaster Worker's perspective
 - The Victim's perspective
 - The Effects on Disaster Workers



Subjects

- Mental Preparation
- Physical Preparation
- Interpersonal Communication Skills
- Communicator Roles in Disaster Environments



Mental Preparedness

- The mental preparation for disaster deployment is an integral component of pre-deployment.
- The ability to recognize the characteristics of disaster areas and the associated stress typically resulting from working in these areas, as well as different coping strategies, can have a significant impact on a worker's ability to function in a disaster area.



Personal Preparedness

You are going to be away...

- Personal Health
- Child, Elder, or Pet Care
- Bills, Mail, and Other Services
- Family Explanations



Packing for Disaster Deployment

(More details later today)



- Identification
- Documentation
- Prohibited Items
- Food
- Water
- Appropriate Clothing
- Cash
- Medication
- Personal Hygiene and Essentials
- Miscellaneous Items
- *Radio equipment too!*



Working Conditions

- The type of disaster
- The length of time that has passed since the disaster
- The magnitude of the emergency response effort



Environmental Characteristics

- Amount of Change – *It's not home!*
- Lack of Common Services
- Sleeping Conditions
- Working Conditions
- Handling High Stress Calls/Messages
- Casualty Incidents



Coping Skills

- Stress and fatigue are common. However, **stress** and **fatigue** may easily progress to **depression** and, in some cases **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**
- Preparation
 - Chain of Command
 - Functioning Environment
 - Communication Equipment



Coping Skills - Stress

- Signs of stress
 - Irritability
 - Inability to concentrate
 - Mistakes in job performance
 - Forgetfulness
- May include:
 - Fear of making a mistake
 - Disgust
 - Feeling overwhelmed
 - Many emotions all at once



Coping Skills - Family

- The **possible inability to communicate with family members** in a disaster area may be a frequent occurrence. Be sure not only you recognize limitations of regular communication, but **family members must understand the possible limitations** in communication
- Talk with your family and explain how the destruction in a disaster area and shift work may adversely impact your ability to call home
- Time zone difference



Coping Strategies 1

- Exercise
- Nutrition
- Breaks
- Out of Place, Out of Mind
- Sleep/Work Schedule
- Remember... It Could Be Worse



Coping Strategies 2

- Think About Other Things
- Take a Deep Breath and Relax
- Talk to Others
- Avoid Alcohol/Drugs
- Humor



Interpersonal Communication Skills

- Effective/active listening

There is a very important difference between "hearing" and "listening."



Active and Effective Listening Skills

- Develop a positive attitude
- Limit unnecessary talking/interruptions
- Remain objective to the message
- Paraphrase and use feedback
- Do not formulate an instant response
- Maintain eye contact with the person
- Control emotions and nonverbal communication



Active and Effective Listening Skills

- Effective/active listening
- Calming emotionally upset persons
- Assertiveness



Emotionally Upset Tools

- Use available time
- Allow the person to talk
- Provide and enable support
- Physical contact



Communication Techniques

- **Submissive:** does not express their feelings, thoughts, or impressions
- **Assertive:** expresses their thoughts, feelings, and impressions in a direct and appropriate manner
- **Aggressive:** expresses their thoughts, feelings, and impressions in a direct and inappropriate manner



Assertive Communications

Assertive communication techniques can enable firm, yet non-aggressive communication to occur.



The Victim's Perspective

- Intrusive reaction
- Avoidance & Withdrawal reaction
- Physical Arousal reactions
- Trauma Reminders
- Loss Reminders
- Change Reminders
- Hardships



The Victim's Perspective

- Grief Reaction
 - Traumatic Grief Reaction
 - Depression
 - Anger
-
- Children and elderly are especially susceptible



7 steps to address emotional well being

1. Be prepared for the unknown
2. Prepare your family
3. Consistently assess your mental Health
4. Be aware of organization's work requirements and available support services
5. Utilize self-care strategies (do what you enjoy)
6. Be aware of actions that increase stress
7. Focus on the positive (accomplishments)



Your Perspective

- Shifts and shift structures that require overtime can lead to sleep disruption or deprivation and have other harmful impacts on emotional health and interpersonal relationships.
- Insufficient sleep can also cause irritability, short temper, health issues, and other concerns.
- Studies have likened the effects of sleep deprivation to the effects of drinking what most would consider an excessive amount of alcohol.



Your Perspective

- Emergency dispatchers, who operate phone lines and assist 911 callers, are increasingly being recognized as emergency personnel rather than clerical workers, as research has shown them to experience emotional distress and vicarious (secondary) trauma at the same rates as police officers.



Effects of stress

- Stress: Heavy stress may lead to burnout, which may impact job performance and lead to the development of other concerns.
- Burnout can also be detrimental to a person's outlook, both in relation to their work and their personal life.
- PTSD: may have difficulty adequately performing duties at work and/or begin to avoid work due to the memories of the trauma





Effects of stress

- First responder “hero” culture. The idea that “helpers shouldn’t need help”
- The old “Just get over it” approach does not work.
- Estimates from the Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance suggest that as many as 400 firefighter and EMT deaths by suicide occur each year. This excludes other categories of first responders.



Communicator Roles in Disaster Environments

- Old paradigm: “We just do communications”
- New paradigm: “We do what’s asked of us”



Therapy

- Seek or accept therapy immediately following a traumatic event. You may be able to decrease your risk of PTSD, depression, substance abuse, and suicide
- Many individuals might feel uncomfortable seeking “help” due to the [stigma](#) around the idea of a first responder “hero” culture that “helpers shouldn’t need help” for mental health concerns



In Summary

- Be prepared
 - Mentally
 - Physically
- Family Communications
 - Stay connected if you can
- Strategies
 - Coping Skills
 - Communication
- Professional and Peer Assistance
 - Don't fall into the stigma of not asking.... Ask!



References

- APCO/NENA ANS 1.105.2-201x Standard for Telecommunicator Emergency Response Taskforce (TERT) Deployment
- FEMA Webinar on well being of 1st responders
- FEMA EMI-ISP IS-144 Telecommunicator Emergency Response Taskforce (TERT)
- Quick Series – Physiological First Aid (PFA)
- Several Google ‘hits’ on the subjects covered



Links & Apps of interest

- Code Green Campaign (<http://codegreencampaign.org/>)
- Psychological First Aid (PFA) app (iOS and Android)



Questions?

Slides will be posted to the www.seapac.org website
> *Workshops* > *Past Workshops* > 2018



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