



Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress

Understanding the Effects of Trauma and Traumatic Events to Help Prevent, Mitigate and Foster Recovery for Individuals, Organizations and Communities
A Program of Uniformed Services University, Our Nation's Federal Medical School, Bethesda, Maryland • www.usuhs.mil/csts/

Body Recovery and Stress Management for Leaders and Supervisors

The magnitude of death and destruction in this event require special measures to manage body recovery. Physical safety and security of body handlers takes priority over providing psychological counseling. Supervision is paramount in maintaining an organized, efficient work party for recovery efforts. Jurisdictional issues will be present and will not be easily resolved due to conflicts between investigative and recovery tasks. Provide a management structure to direct workers to where they are needed and provide supervision. One of the risks with a task of this magnitude is workers “getting lost” with no one who knows who or where they are.

It is difficult to predict the kinds of psychological problems that any individual will have, however, the following management plan can help minimize later difficulties:

- Limit times of exposure to the dead and to the scene and require rest periods for volunteers and professionals.
- Provide a rest area with fluids and food and protection from news media and onlookers.
- Get people off their feet during breaks.
- Provide shade with cots and facilities for washing and showering.
- Provide some immediate change of clothing, such as socks, t-shirts, and underwear.

- If possible, have people return home for food and sleep.
- Over-dedication to the task of recovery is a risk factor for disability.
- Pairing workers with a buddy can help combat potential overwork.
- Allow people to vary their tasks so they can adjust their exposure.
- Engage workers in conversation of their choosing – not necessarily about their feelings or the scene. Talking about the events of life is central to health.
- Dealing with personal effects is one of the most difficult aspects of body recovery especially if people personalize or identify with . Discourage identification with the dead or personalizing
- Persons who have difficulty with the recovery tasks often do not want to be dismissed, which may contribute to a sense of failure. Assign them to another task in which they can contribute, but do not use the individual’s desire to continue work as the sole factor determining assignment of duties.
- Every individual has a different way of approaching this type of scene. It is not advisable to require the same actions of everyone.
- Advise people not to personalize or identify with the remains or the situation.