Unit 4. Managing Mass Fatalities Operations
Incident Operations

- On-scene operations:
  - Staging
  - Search and recovery
  - Notification of response personnel
- Morgue operations
- Family Assistance Center operations
Unit Objectives

- Describe critical operations for mass fatalities incidents.
- Describe the protocols for on-scene operations.
- Establish procedures for working with the media.
- Identify measures required to take care of incident workers.
What on-scene protocols should be established in advance of an incident?
Protocols for On-Scene Operations

- Establish a perimeter to keep emergent volunteers, curious onlookers, and others away from the incident scene.
- Ensure that search operations methodology is established and followed.
- Ensure that all search and recovery personnel wear PPE.
Protocols for On-Scene Operations

- Protect the incident scene, even if it is not a suspected crime scene.
- Preserve evidence and personal effects.
- Manage expectations about how quickly operations can be completed.
Who makes the decision to end rescue operations and initiate recovery operations?
On-Scene Operations: Resource Staging

Staging areas:

- Are the location where resources, including equipment and crews, report until they are assigned.
- Are not intended as a holding place for:
  - Spontaneous volunteers.
  - Response/recovery resources that have been demobilized.
Staging Area Issues

- Coordinating incoming personnel and equipment
- Limiting access
- Tracking assigned resources versus those awaiting assignment
Search and Recovery

All procedures required to:

▪ Analyze the site to determine:
  ▪ Whether hazardous materials are present
  ▪ Whether the site presents a biological hazard
  ▪ The condition of remains

▪ Locate, document, and remove remains and personal property

▪ Remove debris
Search Methods

- Global positioning system (GPS)
- Total station technology
- Grid searching
Global Positioning System

Visual 4.12
Mass Fatality Incident Response
Global Positioning System
Global Positioning System

- Space Segment
- Control Segment
- User Segment
Identifying Remains: Grid Searching

- Location of remains may reveal placement of the victim before the incident.
- Injuries may reveal the cause of the incident.
- Evidence is critical to ensuing investigation.
- Fragmented remains may be reassociated after the incident.
Using the Structure as a Grid
Search and Recovery Issues

- Worker safety, including removal of hazards
- Debris removal
- Locating, marking, and removing remains
- Doing all of the above without disturbing potential evidence (if the site is or could be a crime scene)
Activity: Search and Recovery

1. Work in table groups as assigned by the instructor.
2. Consider your jurisdiction’s ability to respond to a mass fatalities incident and answer the questions included in the activity.
3. Select a spokesperson to present your responses to the class. Be ready to explain your group’s responses.

You have 15 minutes to complete this activity.
Documentation

- The incident scene
- Human remains, including fragmented and/or remains that are decomposing
- Personal effects
- Debris

*Preserve Evidence; Don’t Rush!*
Document the Scene

- Both still photographs and videotape
- Aerial photographs
- Ground-level photographs with proper orientation or location noted in the photo
- Photograph body in relationship to wreckage and personal effects
Document the Scene
Document the Scene

- Detailed written documentation at the scene is a must.
- Consider a detailed scene sketch.
- Assign a scribe, if necessary.
- Make certain that this documentation is put into the record of the event.
Debris Removal

It took 7 days to remove these remains!
Debris Removal

How are you going to remove all of the debris? Where will you put it?
Documenting Wreckage

- Debris patterns may provide clues about how incidents, especially transportation incidents occurred.
- Workers should be briefed on:
  - What to look for.
  - What to avoid moving.
  - Known safety issues within the wreckage.
Documenting Personal Effects

- In a major event, there may be thousands of pieces of personal property scattered throughout the site.
- All of the personal property must be collected and accounted for.
In transportation incidents, the Family Assistance Act recommends how personal effects are managed.

In non-transportation incidents, decisions on personal effects are made jointly with the family.

Aside from monetary value, families gain greatly from return of personal effects.
Numbering System Considerations

- The system should be simple and use whole numbers.
- Use the same number on the toe tag, the tag on the outside of the remains pouch, and on personal effects that are definitely associated with the remains.
- Assign a range of non-duplicative, consecutive numbers to each search and recovery team.
- After morgue triage, the remains should be assigned a sequential morgue reference number.
- Do not use leading zeros.
Numbering System Considerations
Extrication and Transport of Remains

- Extrication
- Show of respect
- Transport
- Temporary storage of remains
Extrication Myths

According to OSHA:

- There is no direct risk of contagion or infectious disease from being near human remains for those who are not directly involved in recovery.
- Pathogens associated with human remains:
  - Do not pose a risk to those who are not directly involved in recovery.
  - Do not pose an environmental risk.
- The smell of human decay does not create a public health hazard.

Incident Site Collection and Storage

- An area may be set to collect remains prior to transport to morgue.
- Refrigerated trucks may be necessary at this site.
- Remains may be transported by refrigerated truck or individually.
- This is simply an on-site storage facility.
Removing Remains From The Scene

Log sheet should include the:

- Field recovery number.
- Number of remains being transported.
- License number of transport vehicle.
- Name of vehicle driver.
- Signature of driver.
- Date and time of departure from site.
Removing Remains From Scene

- Store body bags in refrigerated/cooler truck until transported at 38 to 42 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Use trucks with metal construction.
- No company names should be visible.
Temporary Storage

- Arrange with vendor in advance
- Figure 20-25 bodies per truck
- **No wooden floors**
- Cover truck names completely
- Be prepared for mechanical problems
- **Sanitize thoroughly after Mission**
- **Maintain an aisle down the center of the trailer**
Managing Catastrophic Incidents

Basic procedures remain unchanged, but **scale changes everything!**
Managing Catastrophic Incidents

What constitutes a catastrophic incident?
Managing Catastrophic Incidents

What issues would you face in a catastrophic incident that you might not face in incidents involving a smaller number of fatalities?
Legal and Financial Constraints

- Does your State have laws to protect MEs/Cs during a severe incident?
- Does your State have a “good Samaritan” law?
- Do purchasing requirements change?
- Is the ME/C responsible for on-scene recovery personnel?
- How do the ME/C responsibilities change if assistance is requested from the State and/or Federal government?
Managing Resources at Catastrophic Incidents

- How many fatalities can your current resource system handle accurately, efficiently, and safely?
- Has your jurisdiction determined how many additional resources, including personnel and facilities, will be required for “X” fatalities?
- Who has the authority to approve resource orders?
- Has your jurisdiction identified sources for additional resources?
  - How long will it take to receive them?
  - How will they be received? Stored? Distributed? Paid for?
  - What if they don’t arrive?
Activity: Managing Resources

Instructions:
1. Work in groups assigned by the instructor. The instructor will assign a type of resource.
2. Answer the question about the resource assigned: What will you do if the resources you need don’t arrive?
3. Try to develop at least 2 strategies for either obtaining or working around the needed resource.

You have 15 minutes to complete this activity.
Protecting Workers

- How will you protect:
  - Recovery personnel?
  - Transport personnel?
  - Morgue Personnel?
- How will you ensure that personnel will eat and take breaks?
- How will you enforce the requirements?
Transportation and Storage

- What facilities are available?
- What are your options?
- What actions are taboo?
Temporary Interment

- May be necessary in a catastrophic situation
- Try to complete identification process before interment
- Must document where various sets of remains are buried
Security

- All areas must be secured. There may be legal repercussions for any security breech.
- Media and other onlookers must be kept out of all facilities.
- Personnel must be safe when they are working.
Taking Care of Workers

- Provide appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Provide appropriate safety briefings.
- Enforce the use of PPE and safety rules.
- Establish a stress management program.
- Ensure adequate rest and rehab.
- Provide and enforce breaks.
- Provide a consistent work schedule.
Worker Responsibilities

- Wear the PPE that is issued.
- Use universal precautions.
- Decontaminate when necessary.
- Follow all safety information and guidelines provided.
- Report any and all injuries immediately.
- Keep an eye on fellow workers.
Mass Fatalities Incidents and Stress

- Mass Fatalities incidents are stressful
- Initial discomfort & distress common
- Most people adapt well psychologically
- Most people function well
- Stress is incident-specific & cumulative
- Affected by other stressors ("real-world" issues)
Preparedness for Mass Fatalities

- Practice promotes resiliency to stress
- Use realistic training & exercises
- Learn your chain-of-command
- Develop family support plans
- Establish workplace agreements
- Maintain physical fitness & good health practices
Traumatic Stressors in Mass Death

- Emotional involvement—that which reminds us that the remains were people
- Personal effects—makes a life real
- Bodies of children—affect everyone emotionally
Traumatic Stressors in Mass Death

- Surprise and novelty—shock at the unexpected
- Sensory stimuli—be prepared for overload
- Condition of remains—natural or gruesome
- Hands and faces of the remains
Common Emotional Reactions to Human Remains

- Sadness
- Pity
- Horror
- Repulsion
- Anger
- Fear
- Numbness
- Disgust
Physical Reactions to Stress

- Sense of being “wired” or “keyed up”
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Difficulty sleeping
- Diarrhea
- Appetite changes
- Fatigue
Managing Incident Stress: Self and Buddy Care

- Pair off with a co-worker and look out for each other
- Remember the larger purpose of your work
- Talk with others
- Switch tasks as needed
- Be a good listener
- Use appropriate humor
Managing Incident Stress: Self and Buddy Care

- Consider avoiding TV news during incident
- Take time to decompress at end of shift
- Limit exposure to stressors
- Avoid focusing on remains’ hands and faces
- Use operational discipline:
  - Avoid overwork & fatigue—take breaks and leave at shift’s end
  - Use proper PPE
Leadership Actions to Diminish Incident Stress

- Lead by example
- Maximize worker safety
- Communicate regularly
- Limit traumatic exposure
- Visit work areas and talk with workers
- Praise and reward people’s work
- Ensure adherence to work/rest cycles
Leadership Actions to Diminish Incident Stress

- Protect workers from distractions/hassles
- Allow workers to “ease in” & vary tasks
- Pair inexperienced with experienced workers
- Remember that people react and cope differently
- Be alert to changes in workers’ behaviors
- Foster supportive command climate
Leadership Issues as Teams Rotate Out

- Perform After-Action Review (AAR)
  - Information sharing
  - Lessons learned
- Establish safe climate for candor
- Information on assistance resources
  - Personal
  - Financial
  - Family
Working With the Media

- Helps manage the public’s expectations
- NIMS requirements:
  - Assign a PIO
  - Develop a Joint Information System
  - Establish a Joint Information Center
Public Information Officer

- Must be assigned as early as possible. The PIO must also be familiar with:
  - The overall incident.
  - Procedures for recovering and identifying remains.
  - Procedures for release of remains.
  - Family notification procedures.
Working With the Media

What are some ways to work successfully with the media?
Has anyone developed templates for media releases for mass fatalities incidents?
Unit Summary

Operational Issues

Taking Care of Workers

Working With the Media