

HUMAN SIDE OF DISASTER



**South Texas Chapter
Association of Contingency Planners
January 15, 2002**

Human Side of Disaster



INCIDENT

Incident



- Suddenly there is an explosion at your work site.
 - Employees are frantic and disoriented
 - Media arrives within minutes
 - Police arrive
 - Ambulances and fire equipment arrive
 - After a traumatic event/disaster, your first responders will likely be your own employees.

Incident



- Immediately protect employees from additional trauma and stress (dangerous areas, witness rescue of injured persons, media intrusion, etc.) Shelter them from seeing dead or injured persons being removed.

Incident



- Direct Employees to secured areas away from outside influences and exposures
 - Identify a place to have appropriate employees congregate
 - Smaller rooms feel safer than large, open areas
 - Monitor doorways to insure unwanted outsiders don't enter, e.g., media, attorneys

Incident



- Make contact with victims, witnesses and others experiencing traumatic stress (dazed, confused, shocked, stunned, crying, hyperactive, shaking, or visibly upset)

Incident



■ TELL THEM

- You are safe now
- It is over
- You're experiencing a traumatic stress reaction
- It's O.K., let it flow
- You survived

■ ASK THEM

- How were you involved in the incident?
- What did you see? Hear?
- Are you injured in any way?
- What do you need?
- What can I do to help you?

Incident



- Touching is typically helpful--but it must be natural and appropriate.
- Assist them with issues of immediate concern, such as a drink of water, a blanket, an offer to retrieve personal items or contact a spouse or other family member.

Incident



- Give them information about what happened--they desperately need the facts
 - Dispel rumors or misunderstandings
 - Be forthcoming, but be careful not to give information that will increase anxiety

Human Side of Disaster



PREPAREDNESS

Preparedness



- Assemble a Crisis Management Team
 - Include decision-makers and members whose total responsibility, expertise, and training is on the human side of disaster recovery.

Preparedness



- Train Employee Representatives
 - Identify a team of employees as company representatives in the event of an emergency. Train them in the skills of psychological first aid and triage. They will assist employees and their families if/when the time comes.

Preparedness



- Educate Management and Employees
 - Provide information on the effects of traumatic stress and ways to help oneself and others who have been impacted by a crisis event.

Preparedness



■ Pre-arrange Outside Professional Assistance

- You may need to enlist the help of professionals with expertise and experience in critical incident stress debriefing if your emergency is sufficiently traumatic. *The aftermath of a crisis is the worst possible time to seek out dependable and effective outside assistance.*

Preparedness



- Train Management in Response Capability
 - It is not enough just to have a plan and a team. The Crisis Management Team must be familiar with and prepared to carry out the Structured Management Response plan.

Human Side of Disaster



RESPONSE

Response



- Some Guidelines for a Structured Management Response
 - While each incident is unique, there are certain steps you can take in the aftermath of a traumatic event that will make the process go more smoothly.

Response



- Provide “Psychological First Aid”
 - Make every effort to identify and assist those who are deeply affected by traumatic stress. These people need to be separated from the disaster scene, but not isolated. Move them to a safe place, under the care of counselors or caring friends. Get appropriate assistance.

Response



- Provide Management-led De-escalation Meetings
 - It may seem kinder to simply let them go home, but people suffering from traumatic stress do not need isolation. They need structure, peer support, facts and information. If these immediate concerns are well met recovery will be greatly aided. The de-escalation meetings should be provided before allowing employees to leave the worksite for their homes.

Response



- Contact Family Members of Casualty Victims
 - Death and serious injury notification is a very difficult and stressful duty. It is best if two management representatives make the initial visit-quickly-before the message is delivered by the media or other less caring messengers.

Response



- Protect Your Employees from the Media
 - Guard affected employees and family members from media contact. All employees are to be instructed not to make comments if approached by the media. They are stressed, stunned, dazed and confused following a traumatic incident--a poor time to make any public statements. Instruct them that all comments to the media will be handled by the company spokesperson.

Response



- Plan Your Communications to the Media
 - Determine what information is appropriate to share with the public and the manner in which it is disseminated. Because the company will be under strict scrutiny following a disaster, it is important to control the flow of information to outside sources. Legal counsel and outside consultants are key players in this task.

Response



■ Telephone Operators

- Receptionists and others who must confront the public need careful instructions in what to say and do. These employees may be under particularly heavy stress. Consider short shifts, or relief from duty. Have them log all calls.

Response



- Assess the Need for Professional Traumatic Stress Intervention
 - Having made prior arrangements with experienced professionals, determine the need for intervention. Traumatized individuals may need intervention services, such as group debriefings or private interview. These sessions provide for emotional venting--to share and normalize reactions.

Response



- “At Risk” Employees
 - Identify persons who may be at potential risk of continuing or escalating traumatic stress reactions. “At risk” persons may be identified by the group debriefing leader, by local management and supervisors, by co-workers, or by making self-referrals.

Response



- Provide Management Briefings for Employees Returning to Work
 - Management briefings should be offered as the initial processing step for employees when they return to work. Typically, they are held the morning after the incident and are best received when conducted by senior-level management.

Response



- Maintain Communication with Your Employees
 - Employees have a great need for information and facts following a critical incident. They need this directly from management. It is important to give truthful, accurate, and complete information.

Response



- Additional Considerations
 - Enlist outside crews to clean up the incident scene. This activity can be highly stressful for affected employees.
 - Allow employees to visit the scene of the incident. This is helpful in the grieving process.
 - Provide outreach for hospitalized victims through an assigned family liaison representative.

Response



- Additional Considerations (con't)
 - Senior management and an assigned family liaison representative should personally visit families of fatalities or critical injuries.
 - Communicate your funeral attendance policy to employees.
 - Consider providing a memorial service, especially if a funeral is held out of town from the company location.
 - Will there be a trust fund for victims families?

Human Side of Disaster



RECOVERY

Recovery



- If the incident has not been exceedingly traumatic, and management has carefully addressed employee needs, full recovery is often experienced quickly. The shared experience and the camaraderie that typically develops in crisis response can be a positive derivative from a difficult time.

Recovery



- Follow-up should include:
 - Continued two-way communications
 - Vigilance for any employees who may still need assistance

Response



- A well thought-out plan that is implemented successfully in the aftermath of a disaster has proven to dramatically increase the employee recovery rate. Added benefits are improved morale, loyalty, and productivity.
- **Don't wait for a crisis. Establish detail plans to protect your most vital asset--your employees!!**