

# **CRISIS EMERGENCY RISK COMMUNICATION**

**BE FIRST. BE RIGHT. BE CREDIBLE.**

## **CERC: Human Resources for Crisis Communication**



**U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services**  
Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention

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# CERC: Human Resources for Crisis Communication

**In this chapter, the following topics are discussed:**

- Working with responders from varied backgrounds
- Appropriate staffing and preparation to maintain the well-being of communicators
- Emotional health issues for those responding to a crisis
- Emotional health issues for families of deployed emergency response workers

Crises, disasters, and emergencies require diverse resources for the right preparation and response. This includes human resources. Disasters bring many people together with different training, experiences, and backgrounds. These events can create stress that complicates human resource management.<sup>1</sup>

## **Working with Responders from Varied Backgrounds<sup>2</sup>**

A crisis or disaster brings people together who might not normally interact. This includes people with diverse backgrounds, training, and perspectives:

- Politicians, who may have little formal training for emergency responses and may need to interact with professional emergency management personnel
- Volunteers, who may be participating in a number of activities, such as assisting evacuees, collecting information, and dispensing food and water
- Public health professionals, who may be working side by side with law enforcement officials
- Professional leadership, who may be representing businesses, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and many communities

*“When you do hiring, you can hire for skill, but you also want to hire for aptitude, and I definitely looked for aptitude and learning new things, aptitude and technology, and a desire to play around, experiment and see what you can do with new things.”*

*Leng Caloh,  
Interactive Strategies Manager,  
KPBS San Diego*

While the people involved in a crisis response usually share common goals, they often have varied training, backgrounds, expectations, and experiences.<sup>3</sup> This at times can create conflicts and make coordination challenging. A crisis is always a complex work environment, with huge pressures and stress, and long work hours. In many cases, the event will take place in a remote location. Participants are making decisions and taking actions that affect the lives and well-being of others.

Even when you are focused on those who have been personally affected by the crisis, it's necessary to ensure an effective response for all who are involved. Therefore, the well-being of your responders requires special attention.<sup>4,5,6</sup>



## **Appropriate Staffing and Preparation to Maintain the Well-Being of Communicators**

Public information officers (PIOs) and other CERC communicators are responders who interact with other first responders. Like other responders, they are often extremely committed and think of others before themselves. While it is this generous outlook that calls them to this work, it is imperative that they, and those managing them, be encouraged to pay close attention to their physical and emotional well-being throughout the crisis. The strength and resilience of responders is the engine behind a successful response and recovery.

PIOs and CERC professionals are often placed in particularly stressful situations as they face media, people directly affected by the event, politicians, and other responder groups. Communication professionals need to pay close attention to their preparation, as well as their physical and emotional needs, as each crisis evolves. This chapter discusses important steps to ensure that they can function at an optimum level as they respond to the event.

### **First Responder Stress**

Public health officials and CERC professionals are first responders and are likely to experience unique levels and types of stress. In addition, they may be asked to develop messages to help manage the stress that other responders experience. These kinds of problems range from acute or short-term stress reactions to the long-term effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Traditional first responders, such as police, fire, and EMS workers, are trained to deal with the daily stress of performing their jobs. Nevertheless, their proximity to death, severe trauma, and perceived threat to themselves and their families can increase their level of stress and present new challenges including methods for coping. According to one study of first responders, “Firefighters and other emergency responders follow the principle: Risk a life to save a life.”<sup>7</sup> During a terrorist attack, this response may be even more intense. The threat and horror of the event, the intensity of the work, the long hours and duration, and the uncertainty can all contribute to unusually high levels of stress. Communication personnel may not receive the type of instruction they need to be ready for first-responder stress as part of their routine training.

Health-care professionals and trade workers also experience increased stress as they are called to assist the victims in the aftermath of a crisis. For example, following the attacks on September 11, 2001, mental health professionals, social workers, and medical professionals assisting victims and disaster workers at Ground Zero experienced the following:

- Increased levels of emotional exhaustion
- Anxiety and depression
- Psychological distress<sup>8</sup>



One study documented the stress associated with the terrorist attack: “Over 100 cases of psychological stress among construction and trades personnel were treated during the first nine weeks at the World Trade Center. The consensus is that many more experienced such stress, but did not seek treatment.”<sup>6</sup>

Since 2001, public health officials and CERC professionals have been recognized as first responders for crises and emergencies because they have to deal with the intense pressure from the media and general public to provide information immediately and accurately throughout the duration of the crisis.<sup>9</sup>

Responders have the added stress of their homes being damaged or lost, and family, friends, and pets possibly missing or dead. They often struggle between their duty to their work and their duty to family and friends. If concerns for keeping responders safe during crisis response aren’t addressed by employers prior to a crisis, one can expect higher rates of the following:<sup>7,10</sup>

- Distraction
- Absenteeism
- Poor decision making
- Refusal to come to work

## **Disaster Trauma – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder is an anxiety disorder that people can develop after experiencing an emergency or disaster. Everyone who experiences a disaster, including responders, is at risk of experiencing stress symptoms, which could lead to PTSD, other anxiety disorders, or depression. Disaster responders are vulnerable to getting PTSD, as they may not be able to stop thinking about what they saw or experienced for months after the event. It is important to remember that not everyone who lives through a disaster gets PTSD. With any type of disaster, it is likely that people will report sadness, anxiety, stress, and fear, but they usually do not develop PTSD.<sup>11</sup>

According to the National Institute of Mental Health,<sup>11</sup> PTSD symptoms can include:

- Re-experiencing: flashbacks or bad dreams
- Avoidance: emotional numbness, staying away from the location that is a reminder
- Hyperarousal: being easily startled, “on edge,” or having difficulty sleeping

Risk factors for PTSD include:

- Surviving a dangerous event or trauma
- Little or no social support following the event
- Dealing with additional stressors post-event, such as the loss of a family member
- History of mental illness
- Witnessing people get killed or injured
- Being injured



It is important to pay close attention to your physical and emotional well-being throughout a crisis. Even the most experienced response workers can be psychologically and emotionally affected by a disaster response. The strength and resilience of responders is the engine behind a successful response and recovery, so it is vital that you manage your stress as much as possible.

As a communicator, you should also be aware of the risk factors and symptoms of PTSD when developing your messages. When discussing the disaster, take care to express sensitivity and empathy to the intense feelings your audience may be experiencing. Consider adding messages that let people know where psychological support and resources are available.

### **Pre-crisis Planning for Human Resources**<sup>12,13</sup>

The following is a list of pre-crisis activities that can be useful to include in human resources planning:

**Provide job training:** The following is a human resource communication checklist when considering team training:

- Train communicators for designated emergency response tasks.
- Ask the following questions during training exercises:
  - Are phone numbers, including cell phone numbers, and e-mail addresses up-to-date in your plan?
  - Does your team respond within an appropriate timeframe after they are alerted?
  - Are backup personnel ready if primary responders are away or out of reach?
  - Can an early skeletal staff produce, get authorization for, and then release an initial news statement within 2 hours of obtaining information?
  - Are the initial steps such as verification, notification, clearance, and coordination executed properly?
  - Is equipment adequate, including personal protective equipment?
  - Will personnel pulled in from other departments or agencies have sufficient access to your organization's computer files and network?
- Refresh training routinely. At a minimum that training should include a review and update of the crisis communication plan as well as a discussion of roles. Create training drills routinely (possibly unannounced) to see how effectively your crisis communication operations can get up and running. They are also good ways to bring people with diverse backgrounds together.

In addition to tabletop exercises and drills, technological advances in communication are reshaping crisis communication. Social media, with its rapid development, has created a new training need. Communicators must take the required time to regularly upgrade their skills in these and other areas.



Training has the added benefit of reducing uncertainty and enhancing confidence. Public health professionals will be more confident when they can say, “I have trained for this and I know the people with whom I will be working.”

**Provide training in stress management:** PIOs and other communicators will experience major time constraints and must balance competing interests of multiple stakeholders. They may be asked to make and implement decisions that affect the health and well-being of others. They may face angry constituents and respond to emotionally challenging questions. During a crisis, they will function under conditions of very high uncertainty, which also adds to stress.

Techniques and skills that reduce and manage stress can be very helpful for first responders, including crisis communicators. Although these techniques and skills cannot eliminate stress, they can help reduce its impact. It will be important to help communicators and others managing a response understand, anticipate, and prepare for the stress. Some stress relief techniques include the following:

- Exercise
- Meditation
- Relaxation
- Development of support systems

Not every technique will work for every person. Individuals need to learn what works best for them. It is important to recognize that stress from different sources adds up to greater total stress. Managing stress in one’s personal life will reduce the overall stress that might be experienced during a disaster.

### **Stress Management Techniques to Consider**

Individual stress management training consists of learning to control and even turn off the body’s fight-or-flight response. The body has another counter-balancing reaction to stress described by Dr. Herbert Benson called the relaxation response, which returns breathing, heart rate, and minds back to a relaxed state.<sup>14</sup> You can learn to turn on this relaxation response, by learning various methods of relaxation training.

Relaxation can be achieved through many kinds of meditation: Tai chi, yoga, and the technique of progressive relaxation or biofeedback training are some well-known methods. Other stress management techniques include journal writing, aerobic fitness, muscle strength training, and maintaining proper nutrition.

Talking to close friends or coworkers and receiving feedback is a form of emotional release that can allow people to work through feelings and make sense of the experience. Social support can aid the process of putting a traumatic experience into context so that it no longer exerts an overly powerful influence on one’s life. If symptoms persist over time, social support may not be enough and a referral to a psychological professional should occur to see if the person needs therapy or professional aid.



**Acknowledge levels of experience:** Develop a system for assessing expertise so team members can be promoted as they gain more skills and experience in responding during an emergency. For example, the American Red Cross ranks responders, from technician to specialist to coordinator, and then assistant officer and officer.<sup>8</sup> The American Red Cross offers different tracks depending on level of emergency response experience and if they are volunteers, staff, or subject matter experts (SMEs) such as mental health workers, social workers, or nurses. Informal and formal performance reviews of members also help to give important feedback as well as develop leaders. Not everyone with specialized skills wants to lead, but their level of emergency response expertise should be recognized.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) offers training options for PIOs. These include basic and advanced PIO courses. Their courses range from a classroom-oriented National Incident Management System (NIMS) training, to more scenario-driven National Response Framework Integrated Emergency Management courses. Topics address the full range of PIO responsibilities in disaster response. FEMA also provides an extensive PIO position checklist.<sup>15</sup>

Because PIOs are considered part of the incident command staff during crisis response, the National Public Health Information Coalition and the Department of Homeland Security strongly recommend they complete the NIMS core courses, as well as other PIO-specific courses. One study shows that public health PIO job responsibilities are multi-layered assignments and can include:<sup>16</sup>

- Media relations
- Health campaigns
- Internal and external communication
- Emergency preparedness and risk communication knowledge
- Staff supervision
- Web development

**Maintain a registry of communication professionals:** During a large-scale event, more trained communication professionals may be required as surge staff. This added capacity can be achieved through mutual aid agreements between hospitals, public health agencies, and other organizations.

Others within the agency may also volunteer to be trained. Identify your organization's current staff skill set, especially for those who volunteer at headquarters or are deployed as part of an emergency public health response:

- Reach out regularly to find new volunteers within your organization and add those names to your database.
- Register communicators by specialty areas, types of experience, and level of experience. You should also register their willingness to work in the headquarters, be deployed to a joint information center (JIC), work in evacuation centers, or be sent to remote locations.



- Verify that contact information is current.
- Make sure all of the volunteers' supervisors are willing to lend those staffers during the emergency response.
- Ask people to recommit annually, to ensure the database accurately represents your organization's staff.

The more available responders you have on your list, the more likely your operation can be maintained and ready to meet your organization's demands. Building and maintaining a communicator's list will give you an assessment of the current staff inventory if and when you need it.

Divide your registry according to the types of jobs identified in your organization's crisis communication plan. For example, if your plan indicates that your website or 24-hour phone operations support will come from another organization, there's no need to keep those assignments active on your registry.

It is important to clarify agency policy regarding the positions that non-paid, trained volunteers are permitted to occupy during an emergency. Indicate on the registry who is eligible to serve in supervisory or leadership positions during an emergency response. Establish criteria for management or leadership positions to make this determination.

## Determining Staffing Levels

As an initial step in crisis response, your organization will need to make decisions about communication operations. This includes decisions about daily hours of operation, the number of operational days per week, and, at some point, the expected duration of the response. Initially, the nature of the event and its scope and scale will not be well understood. As the crisis unfolds, you will need to reassess your staffing needs. Risk assessment tools can help make these decisions.<sup>17</sup>

Stagger work shifts to ensure continuity in operations and clear situational awareness. An uninformed team may come to the JIC fresh and have little knowledge about the state of events. You don't want your entire communication staff to be replaced at once, or the entire staff will be uninformed. Staggering team rotations—at various times in the operational day—will provide more continuity. For example, 12-hour shifts can be staggered so that some are working 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., others come in at 4:00 p.m. and work until 4:00 a.m., and still others are arriving at noon and working until midnight.

Leaders also need relief. They often have a hard time disengaging; nevertheless, a well-trained and experienced staff can help leaders feel like they can take necessary breaks. It is the duty of everyone involved to take occasional breaks to help ensure they are functioning at the high level required in an emergency.<sup>9</sup>

*"When I was out there, there was a couple days when I worked 22 hours in a 24-hour day. But . . . you become less effective if you don't get some decent rest."*

*Mayor Dennis Walaker,  
Fargo, North Dakota*



The American Red Cross has deployed millions of volunteers domestically and around the world for more than 130 years.<sup>18</sup> They produced the following guidelines for establishing staff schedules during a crisis:

■ **Initial phase:**

- Managers should aim to keep the number of hours that each person works per day under 12, with a limit of 16.
- Keep deployments to a field location limited to periods of 3 weeks or less.
- If the emergency is very intense, do not allow personnel to work more than 7–10 days without taking a day off.

■ **Maintenance phase:**

- If the emergency is less intense, managers should normally direct staff to take one 24-hour period off after 7 days of work. They should also be directed to take 2 days off within a 3-week period. Typically, an assignment is for 3 weeks.
- If someone continues to be physically and mentally fit after a 3-week assignment, managers may extend an assignment for another 3 weeks. With further reassessment, the assignment may again be extended by 3 weeks, so the total maximum assignment time is 9 weeks.
- If volunteers are deployed far from home, expect that they will return home for a brief stay before redeploying for each of the 3-week assignments.

■ **Resolution phase:<sup>19</sup>**

- Encourage a visit to a mental health counselor before volunteers return home or to their normal jobs.
- There is potential value in offering a voluntary debriefing to participants, as it can help responders process their deployment experience and transition back to daily routines.
- Provide support and educational materials to family members of persons deployed to a crisis away from their home.<sup>20</sup>

## Assessing Individual Capacity in Public and Media Response

During a crisis, some personnel may develop a superhero mentality and try to accomplish too much. The result may be burnout and mistakes.

A motivated worker who is taking repetitive information calls from the public may manage 30–40 repetitive calls requesting information per hour, if he or she is working from a script and does not have to perform any analysis.<sup>12</sup> However, no one should be expected to do an 8-hour shift of this type of call response. A 6-hour shift with breaks is a reasonable guideline. If calls require reassurance, referral, or recommendation, this time should be reduced.



## Reality Check

If the information requires regular updating or substantial script changes, consider the following:

- Don't expect your telephone response workers to master the new information immediately.
- Plan for fewer calls to be managed in a day.

This frontline work is incredibly intense and those responding directly to the public, no matter the job, must be monitored for emotional well-being and given needed support.

**Media response needs:** Press assistants who triage media calls can usually manage at least twice as many calls as media information officers who provide more in-depth assistance. The work of a press assistant can range from taking a message (not always an easy task) to directing the media representative to an alternate source. The people answering these calls provide your organization's first impression. To keep this flowing smoothly, do the following:

- Make sure you assign enough people to this task.
- Secure enough incoming phone lines. If you don't, your press assistants will likely endure many complaints.
- Create a frequently asked questions (FAQ) fact sheet containing known information that can be given to reporters by fax, Web, and e-mail, when possible.

Ensure that the FAQ and other informational documents are updated by a certain time each day. Notify the media when they can expect to see new or updated documents on the Web. This will reduce the amount of human power needed to get through the emergency operation.

For communicators, a tough day of media calls on a single but complex subject could mean between 40 and 50 calls for one press officer. PIOs have been known to manage 100 calls in a day, although that would be rare. Quantity must be tempered by quality. Someone working with issues and not just providing information won't be able to field as many calls. Someone acting as a spokesperson for the agency, doing interviews, will field even fewer calls.

**Spokesperson assignments:** If the media interest is intense or enduring, as expected in a crisis, spokesperson work schedules should also be rotated with overlapping shifts. Fatigue creates mistakes and mistakes by spokespersons can become very problematic. If possible, arrange interviews when spokespersons are most fresh, not when they are tired, such as at the end of a shift. Reduce inevitable stress with lots of support from the PIO, such as talking points and debriefs.



Top leaders should provide no more than four TV interviews in a day, along with two or three shorter telephone interviews.<sup>21</sup> That pace cannot be sustained day after day. An organization director or hands-on leader of the response can't afford to do continuous interviews. While providing access to top leaders helps foster the perception of openness and responsiveness, top leaders should be saved for important moments when the public expects to hear from a policymaker or decision maker. If possible, substitute lower-level organization leaders or SMEs for more routine interview requests. Overexposure of the director may lead to accusations of grandstanding or perceived power struggles.

A spokesperson or SME solely working to provide media and public information response can do six or more short on-camera interviews, interspersed with print and radio interviews, each day. The media would love unlimited access to exclusive in-person interviews. Use your staff wisely and save your human resources for when they're really needed.

## **Emotional Health Issues for Those Responding to a Crisis**<sup>22</sup>

According to the American Red Cross, those who respond to a crisis have the potential to become affected by it as they work long, intensive hours, often under poor conditions. In some cases, responders may face physical dangers. For those deployed away from home, personal support systems are left behind. Supervisory styles vary from person to person, and administrative organization and regulations often must change with little warning, adding additional stress.

Many people who willingly respond to a crisis are dedicated individuals who also tend to be perfectionists. As such, they are at risk of pushing themselves too hard and of not being satisfied with what they have accomplished. They often fail to recognize what has been accomplished and seek to do more.

Frustration is common, and one's usual coping mechanism and sense of humor is often stretched beyond its limits. Workers become exhausted and easily angered. The anger of others, such as workers, people directly affected by the event, and media personnel, sometimes becomes difficult to handle and may be experienced as a personal attack on the worker rather than as a normal response to exhaustion and stress. Survivor guilt may also emerge as workers see what others have lost.

### **Coping**

First responders and crisis PIOs need to understand that if the crisis has a strong, negative impact on them, they may be unable to perform their response duties. During a crisis, when many people are experiencing harm and loss, it may be hard to look past the harm to an individual job. It may also be hard to disengage from the crisis, particularly in an era of 24/7/365 connectivity and handheld devices.

Few people have experienced mass death or destruction. One study of stress among World Trade Center responders noted that stress was significantly compounded because "many of the victims recovered were horribly mangled, and in many cases only parts of bodies were recovered."<sup>7</sup> Responders to the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing dealt with child victims, a truly devastating task for even seasoned



professionals. Deployed responders need to understand and appreciate the intensity of these experiences and talk with others about their emotions.<sup>7,23</sup>

Supervisors should encourage employees to openly discuss their needs and the challenges they are facing. Without these candid conversations, it is impossible to address these needs. Employees need to be encouraged to take time and use stress management techniques such as the following:

### **Personal coping**

#### **■ Take these actions:**

- Recognize that emotions will be high in this abnormal setting and talk about it.
- Eat nutritious food (e.g., fruit versus donuts, peanuts versus chips).
- Take mental breaks.
- Avoid lots of caffeine or alcohol.
- Leave when your shift is over.
- Exercise.

#### **■ Individual Approaches for Stress Prevention and Management<sup>1</sup>**

- Manage your workload:
  - » Set task priority levels with realistic work plans.
  - » Recognize that “not having enough to do” or “waiting” is an expected part of any disaster response.
- Balance your lifestyle:
  - » Eat nutritious food, stay hydrated, and avoid excessive caffeine, alcohol, and tobacco.
  - » Get adequate sleep and rest, especially on longer assignments.
  - » Get physical exercise.
  - » Maintain contact and connection with primary social supports.
- Use stress reduction strategies:
  - » Reduce physical tension by using familiar personal strategies (e.g., take deep breaths, do some gentle stretching, meditate, wash your face and hands, and practice progressive relaxation).
  - » Pace yourself between low- and high-stress activities.



- » Use time off to decompress and “recharge batteries” (e.g., get a good meal, watch TV, exercise, read a novel, listen to music, take a bath, or talk to family).
- » Talk about emotions and reactions with coworkers during appropriate times.

■ **Maintain self-awareness:**

- Recognize and heed early warning signs for stress reactions.
- Accept that one may not be able to self-assess problematic stress reactions.
- Recognize that over-identification with or feeling overwhelmed by victims’ and families’ grief and trauma may signal a need for support and consultation.
- Understand the differences between professional helping relationships and friendships to help maintain appropriate roles and boundaries.
- Examine personal prejudices and cultural stereotypes.
- Recognize when one’s own experience with trauma or one’s personal history interferes with effectiveness.
- Be aware of personal vulnerabilities and emotional reactions, and the importance of team and supervisor support.

**Supervisor support**

■ **Take these actions:**

- Remind workers about the value of their effort.
- Insist that scheduled meal breaks be taken.
- Make nutritious foods and drinks available.
- Expect high emotions and provide someone with whom workers can talk.
- Respond to even timid requests for relief or reassignment.
- Encourage exercise and personal grooming time.
- Accept inoffensive “silliness” that some use to let off steam.
- Despite what they say, insist that workers take time to sleep.

■ **For Supervisors: Minimizing Stress During the Crisis**<sup>24,25</sup>

- Clearly define individual roles and re-evaluate if the situation changes.
- Institute briefings at each shift change that cover the current status of the work environment, safety procedures, and required safety equipment.



- Partner inexperienced workers with experienced veterans. The buddy system is an effective method to provide support, monitor stress, and reinforce safety procedures. Require outreach personnel to enter the community in pairs.
- Rotate workers from high-stress to lower-stress functions.
- Initiate, encourage, and monitor work breaks, especially when casualties are involved. During lengthy events, implement longer breaks and days off, and curtail weekend work as soon as possible.
- Establish respite areas that visually separate workers from the scene and the public. At longer operations, establish an area where responders can shower, eat, change clothes, and sleep.
- Implement flexible schedules for workers who are directly impacted by an event. This can help workers balance home and job responsibilities.
- Reduce noise as much as possible by providing earplugs, noise mufflers, or telephone headsets.
- Mitigate the effects of extreme temperatures through the use of protective clothing, proper hydration, and frequent breaks.
- Ensure that lighting is sufficient, adjustable, and in good working order.
- Supply facemasks and respirators to lessen the impact of odors and tastes, and protect workers' breathing.
- Provide security for staff at facilities or sites in dangerous areas, including escorts for workers going to and from their vehicles.
- Provide mobile phones for workers in dangerous environments. Ensure that personnel know whom to call when problems arise.

## **Encouraging Mental Health and Rejuvenation**

While managing the anthrax crisis, CDC offered a flexible schedule to their communications staff to help prevent burnout. They created two staffs for their media relations efforts and provided each team with alternating 4 days a week on and 3 days off. This strategy was very successful in helping workers cope and perform at their highest level.



## **Emotional Health Issues for Families of Deployed Emergency Response Workers**

While emergency workers may experience stress directly, their family members may also have challenges. They may have a hard time understanding what their loved ones are experiencing. Family members may be worried when workers have been deployed to disaster sites. They may not have the means to cope with the situation. These strategies will help lessen the stress for family members:<sup>19,20,22,23</sup>

- Provide family members with as much information as possible about the disaster and deployment. Unfortunately, in the beginning of a response, your organization may not yet have complete information on the event. Staff may not know the precise location where they will be working, what exactly they will be doing, or how long they will be away from home. Make efforts to update family members as often as possible. They are a key audience and communication plans should include them.
- As a second possible strategy, assign a specific liaison from your organization to family members.

Family members should understand that deployed staff usually work very long hours in very stressful and emotional conditions. In many cases, they may be exposed to scenes of suffering, possible destruction, and the strong emotions, anger, and loss that victims experience.

When a family member returns from a disaster scene, he or she may need time to adjust to the normal pace of everyday life and may require additional rest before resuming previously normal responsibilities. It is important for family members to be able to talk to one another about what happened and the emotions that accompanied the work. Sometimes, deployed workers do not want to burden family with these stories. They may be proud, frustrated, angry, sad, tearful, and happy all at the same time. It may take some time to sort out these conflicting emotions and share them.

Returning deployed workers may also seem overly preoccupied with the disaster experiences and may not seem to share in excitement, disappointment, or frustration about events at home. The disaster experience tends to overshadow everyday events and puts them in a different perspective.

Often, emergency response workers return home with a conscious or unconscious need to reassure themselves about the safety of their environment.<sup>24</sup> Response workers often feel that they left something undone or that they could have done more. Time, understanding, empathy, and support from family are important to readjustment.



## **Conclusion**

Human resources are critical to the effective management of any crisis event. First responders are generally highly committed and skilled. Ongoing training is critical to ensure that responders are performing at their most effective level. Registries of volunteers can help maintain surge capacity to meet the expanding needs of a crisis. Crises and disasters are stressful events. That stress can take a toll on first responders and their families. Anticipating and managing that stress is important. Without effective management, stress will reduce the effectiveness of the first responder work force and possibly cause responders to be added to the list of those affected by the event.



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