

ASSIGNMENT

Although we may function in superhuman ways during a disaster operation, the stress associated with our jobs takes its toll. We get tired...and confused...and hurt...and scared.

So, as hard as it may be to turn over your duties to someone else, when it is time for your shift to be over, leave and take time to recharge. It is critical that we understand the effects of stress and make every effort to deal with it.

*The Heart of
Disaster Response*

Please Respect &
PROTECT YOURSELF
You are very important to us.

Local ESS Contact:



Emergency Preparedness

Emergency Social Services
MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Phone toll free
within B.C. **1-800-585-9559**



Information provided courtesy of American Red Cross

**COPING
WITH DISASTER**



Emotional health issues
for

**DISASTER
WORKERS ON
ASSIGNMENT**



*The Heart of
Disaster Response*

COPIES

As disaster relief workers, we seek to meet the needs of victims and communities following any type of emergency. We are often surrounded by and exposed to disorganization, confusion, scenes of destruction, and the tears and pain of victims.

As disaster workers we have the potential to become secondary victims, working long, hard hours under poor conditions. In some cases, physical dangers exist. Accommodations may be poor when we are near or within the affected area, or may require hours of travel when located outside the affected area.

Our families and friends are left at home, and new friendships are formed while on the operation and while time is scarce. Supervisory styles are different from person to person. Administrative organizations and regulations often change with little warning, creating additional stresses as we try to satisfy the needs of the clients and of the organization.

Most disaster workers are dedicated individuals who tend to be perfectionists. Because of this, we

Emotional health issues for **WORKERS ON ASSIGNMENT**

are at risk of pushing ourselves too hard and of not being satisfied with what we have accomplished. With so much yet to do, we often fail to take credit for what we have done and the effort we have contributed to the operation.

Frustration is common, and our usual sense of humour is often stretched beyond limits. Workers become exhausted, and anger comes easily to the surface. The anger of others--workers, victims, and media--becomes difficult to deal with, and may be seen as a personal attack on the worker rather than as a normal response to exhaustion. Survivor guilt may emerge as workers see the losses of others when they have suffered none themselves.

Remember that you are giving those victimized by the disaster a gift of yourself --your time and your caring-- a gift you could not give if you were also a victim.

This may be your first experience with scenes of great destruction or high levels of injury and death. These are realities we don't often face, and methods of coping with these are not developed overnight. In each of us, there is an unconscious fear that a victim could be you or a loved one. You need to understand and appreciate the intensity of your emotions, and talk to others about

your feelings. It is critical both for ourselves and those we try to help that we understand the effects of stress and make every effort to deal with it.

Stress-relieving activities are not as difficult or time consuming as we may think. A 15-minute walk during a lunch or coffee break; talking to a co-worker, supervisor, or mental health worker; going out to dinner or a movie; or just using deep breathing exercises can significantly reduce stress.

During the operation, it's important to eat nutritional foods, avoid drinking large amounts of caffeine and alcohol, get some exercise whenever possible, and get as much sleep as you can. That way you'll be better able to continue meeting the challenges of your job.

Your supervisors will be attempting to juggle schedules so that you can have some time off to yourself to sleep, read, or just sit in the sunshine. If you feel that you need this time off before you're scheduled for it, just ask. If you need a change of assignment or setting, just ask.

