Health and Safety During a Response:
Psychosocial Impacts

During an animal health emergency response, responders will be involved with or exposed to a number of physical and psychological stresses, many of which can have psychosocial impacts. It is important to recognize the signs of psychological distress, and take steps to minimize their effects.

Psychological Stressors

- **Deployment**
  - Stressful for responder and their families
  - Disruption of regular schedule
  - Being away from home and family
  - Unfamiliar environment
  - New people
- **Working Conditions**
  - Long work hours
  - Physically demanding work
  - Limited or lack of resources
- **Assigned Tasks**
  - Prolonged exposure to injury, death, destruction
  - Performing euthanasia and depopulation
  - Public perception/support
  - Lack of appreciation

Signs of Psychological Stress

The effects of psychological stress can manifest in a number of ways. These include physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioral manifestations.

- **Physical**
  - Fatigue, body aches and pains
  - Nausea, headache
  - Rapid heart rate, sweats and chills
  - Muscle twitching
- **Cognitive**
  - Confusion, disorientation
  - Poor concentration or alertness
  - Memory problems
  - Sleep disturbances, nightmares
- **Emotional**
  - Anxiety
  - Fear
  - Irritability, anger
  - Depression, sense of failure
  - Helplessness, feeling overwhelmed
- **Behavioral**
  - Denial
  - Distrust
  - Blame
  - Withdrawal
  - Inability to relax
  - Excessive worry
  - Substance abuse

Reducing Psychological Stress

- Pace yourself
- Take frequent rest breaks; take breaks away from work areas
- Try to maintain a normal schedule; regular eating and sleeping times
- Drink plenty of water
- Avoid the use of caffeine when possible
- Eat a variety of foods; increase intake of complex carbs
- Communicate with loved ones
- Practice stress/relaxation techniques
- Be aware of psychological stress; monitor levels of stress in yourself as well as other responders
  - Seek assistance, when needed
- If a severe psychological disorder suspected, contact a health professional immediately
- Avoid substance abuse

Additional Resources

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Disaster Health Services
http://www.samhsa.gov/trauma/index.aspx#rhp

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