Health and Safety
Psychosocial Impacts

Mental Health
“a state of psychological and emotional well-being that enables an individual to work, love, relate to others effectively, and resolve conflicts”
~Mental Health Education and Resource Center

PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESSORS
• Deployment
• Working conditions
• Assigned tasks

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 and destruction
• Performing euthanasia and depopulation
• Public perception/support
  – Lack of appreciation
SIGNS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS

- Physical
- Cognitive
- Emotional
- Behavioral

Signs of Psychological Stress

- Physical effects
  - Fatigue, body aches and pains
  - Nausea, headache
  - Rapid heart rate, sweats and chills
  - Muscle twitching

- Cognitive (thinking)
  - Confusion, disorientation
  - Poor concentration or alertness
  - Memory problems
  - Sleep disturbances, nightmares

Signs of Psychological Stress

- Emotional
  - Anxiety
  - Fear
  - Irritability, anger
  - Depression, sense of failure
  - Helplessness, feeling overwhelmed

- Behavioral
  - Denial
  - Distrust
  - Blame
  - Withdrawal
  - Inability to relax
  - Excessive worry
  - Substance abuse

Psychological Disorders

- Mild, transient distress
- Acute Stress Disorder
  - 2 to 28 days after event
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
  - Longer than 4 weeks after event
- Depression
  - Persistence over 2 months after event

Reducing Psychological Stress

- Pace yourself
- Take frequent rest breaks
  - Mental fatigue increases risk of injury
- 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
Reducing Psychological Stress

- Communicate with loved ones
- Choose your own comfort level
- Avoid substance abuse
- Practice stress/relaxation techniques
- Accept what you cannot change
- Formal mental health support

Prevention

- Be aware of psychological stress
- Monitor levels of stress
  - Yourself
  - Other responders
- Seek assistance
- Severe psychological disorder
  - Contact a health professional immediately

Resources

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

Acknowledgments

Development of this presentation was by the Center for Food Security and Public Health at Iowa State University through funding from the Multi-State Partnership for Security in Agriculture

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