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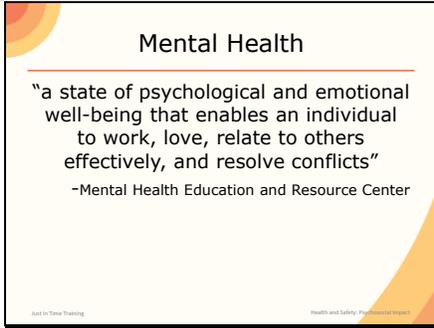
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In addition to the physical demands of an animal health emergency response, there will also be a number of psychological stresses. If ignored, they can lead to serious consequences. This Just-In-Time training presentation will overview some of the psychosocial impacts of being an emergency responder, as well as provide information to help recognize and respond to the signs of psychological distress.

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Maintaining the mental health of emergency responders is just as important as the care and well-being of their physical health. Mental health as defined by the Mental Health Education and Resource Center is “a state of psychological and emotional well-being, that enables an individual to work, love, relate to others effectively, and resolve conflicts.” During any animal health emergency, whether caused by a natural disaster or infectious disease situation, the mental health of all responders will be strained.

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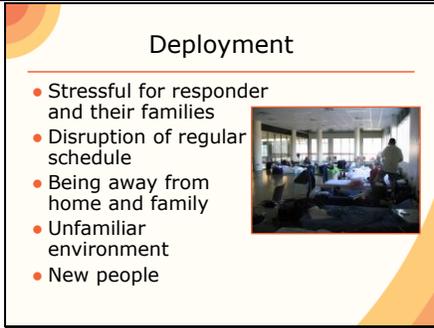
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While most psychological stressors cannot be avoided, it is important to be aware of aspects that can contribute to mental stress as well as ways to minimize their effects. Let's look at some of the psychological stressors that can occur during an animal emergency situation.

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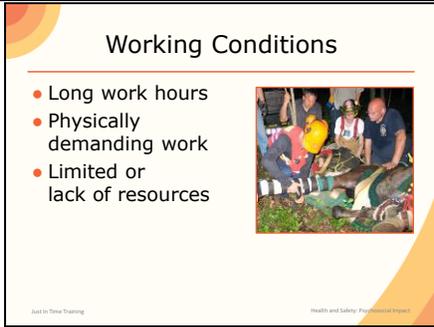
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The act of deployment itself can cause psychological stress. Disruption to your regular work and family schedules as well as being away from your home and family can cause strain for responders and their families. Additionally, you will be working in an unfamiliar environment and with new people. (Photo from Thomas Ratke)

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Working conditions during a response can be demanding. Responders will generally work long hours and perform physically demanding work. Initial phases of the response may be stressful due to limited or lack of resources, including personnel.

Assigned Tasks

- Prolonged exposure to injury, death and destruction
- Performing euthanasia and depopulation
- Public perception/support
 - Lack of appreciation

Tasks you are assigned during the response can also contribute to mental stress. Depending on the response circumstances, you may have prolonged exposure to injury, death and destruction. For example, during natural disaster situations, you may witness death and suffering of humans and animals. For animal disease emergencies, euthanasia and depopulation procedures may be needed. Both of these situations can be extremely powerful mental stresses. Additionally, the public’s perception or support can cause mental anguish, especially in situations where response activities are not appreciated.

SIGNS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS

- Physical
- Cognitive
- Emotional
- Behavioral

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

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

Common physical symptoms of mental stress include fatigue, body aches and pains, nausea, headache, a rapid heart rate, sweats and chills, and possibly muscle twitching. Common cognitive symptoms of stress include confusion, disorientation, poor concentration or alertness, memory problems and sleep disturbances, including nightmares.

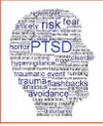
Signs of Psychological Stress

- Emotional
 - Anxiety
 - Fear
 - Irritability, anger
 - Depression, sense of failure
 - Helplessness, feeling overwhelmed
- Behavioral
 - Denial
 - Distrust
 - Blame
 - Withdrawal
 - Inability to relax
 - Excessive worry
 - Substance abuse

Common emotional symptoms of psychological stress can include anxiety, fear, irritability or anger, depression, having a sense of failure, helplessness or feeling overwhelmed. Common behavioral symptoms of stress can include denial, distrust or blame, withdrawal, an inability to relax, excessive worry, and often 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



It is important to understand and recognize the symptoms of psychological stress. If allowed to continue, these symptoms can manifest from mild distress into more severe psychiatric illnesses or disorders which may interfere with an individual’s normal response functions. Severe or chronic psychiatric illnesses or disorders – acute stress disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression – require professional intervention and treatment. Seeking professional help for psychological issues promptly can aid in reducing their impact as well as speed the recovery process. It is important to remember that while development of these disorders can occur during a response event, they can also manifest weeks or months after an event.

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REDUCING PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS

Just In Time Training Health and Safety: Psychosocial Impact

While avoiding psychological stressors during an animal health emergency response will not be possible, there are some steps you can take to minimize their impact.

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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

Just In Time Training Health and Safety: Psychosocial Impact

During response activities, pace yourself. Most response efforts and deployments may continue for days, weeks or months. Take frequent rest breaks, as mental fatigue due to extended shifts can greatly impact your ability to respond and increase the risk of injury. If possible, take breaks away from the work area, to provide some mental relief. Try to maintain a regular eating and sleeping schedule. Drink plenty of fluids (water). Eat a variety of foods and increase your intake of complex carbohydrates (e.g., breads, and muffins made with whole grains, granola bars, etc.).

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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

Just In Time Training Health and Safety: Psychosocial Impact

Other steps you can take to reduce psychological stress include:

- Communicating with loved ones when possible.
- Choosing your own comfort level when talking about the event and your emotional response to it.
- Avoiding substance abuse.
- Practicing stress and relaxation techniques
- Accepting the situation for what it is and what you cannot change
- Taking advantage of any formal mental health support provided during the response

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Prevention

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

Just In Time Training Health and Safety: Psychosocial Impact

Be aware of the signs of psychological stress in yourself, as well as other responders. Early recognition of signs of psychological stress can assure appropriate measures are taken to reduce the effects. Never hesitate to seek assistance and support when needed. If a severe psychological disorder is suspected, contact a mental health professional immediately. (Photo courtesy of Thomas J Ratke)

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Resources

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

Just In Time Training Health and Safety: Psychosocial Impact

For more information on psychosocial issues during an animal health emergency response, consult the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) website. **The information in this presentation is NOT meant to take the place of professional psychological advice. If you or someone you know may be suffering from a severe psychological disorder, contact a health professional.**

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JUST IN TIME TRAINING

Acknowledgments

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