INTRODUCTION

Emergency management’s overall mission involves a dedicated responsiveness to events, whether predictable or unpredictable. We provide emergency services, disaster prevention, and we offer mitigation for calamitous and less than calamitous events. One of our main goals is to work for the preservation of our larger community. Since emergencies occur in every sphere of life, our field is wide-ranging. As emergency management professionals, we serve businesses, organizations, and individuals in our community.

Many professional journals focus on several types of topics that help us serve our constituents. Topics include the technical aspects of emergency response, useful tools, techniques and practices, policies and procedures regulating the behavior of emergency management personnel, and issues of national, regional, and local focus. On occasion, there will be a column focusing on the people-related aspects of our field.

The bottom line for the field is that people make things happen for other people in need of emergency services. Yet, we appear to pay little conscious attention to the people-related aspect of our field. There are many journals that focus on people—for example, the psychological, psychiatric, social work, religious, and business aspects of human behavior. However, how many of us read those journals and understand what they are saying?

The concept of this column is to dedicate space to the people-related aspects of our work in understandable and practical ways. One goal of this column is to create a “teaching point” that you, the user and practitioner, can implement in your local facilities to help address issues and improve performance. People-related aspects of our work touch on many areas, for example:

- victims and their families;
- response providers, their families, and their communities;
- organizational needs for leaders, employees, sponsors, and stakeholders; and
- community issues and needs related to people-related aspects of emergency management and response.

COLUMN GOALS

This column is intended to meet reader needs, fill gaps in knowledge, help with skill development, and improve attitude and behavior. In addition, this column will strive to:

1. Create a useful awareness of the people-related aspects of emergency response (for
example, the effects on behavior of victims, responders, organizations, and communities before, during, and after an event).

2. Increase and/or affirm knowledge, skills, and practices in the people-related aspects of emergency management (self-awareness, victim management, emergency services management, the management of the emergency group’s behavior and of its organization).

3. Help response team leadership and members deal with emerging people-related aspects of emergency management through provocative and creative discussions.

4. Invite readers to share their stories, address direct questions from column followers, and share their comments and opinions.

THE PEOPLE-RELATED ASPECTS SIMPLY STATED

For the purposes of this introductory column, we will divide the people-related aspects of our work into two worlds: the individual and the collective (organizational/group). This division is somewhat artificial because there is a strong interrelationship between the individual and the collective.

OVERVIEW OF INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR

The most common people-related articles found in the general emergency management literature focus on victims and their families. These articles address the “what” and “how” of victim management. The “what” relates to specific questions, such as:

- What is a victim?
- What are the circumstances of the victim?
- What is the impact of the event on the victim (physiologically, emotionally, behaviorally, and spiritually), etc.?

The “how” relates to how the victim is handled with regard to policies and procedures, treatment and safety, and behavior management techniques.

Another aspect of individual behavior focuses on response providers, their families, and their communities. Attention must be paid to significant issues affecting the response provider’s physical, emotional, behavioral (postevent adjustment), and spiritual well-being. A very common topic in this area deals with stress management for the emergency response worker. Some articles in professional journals focus on family issues, such as the impact of worker schedules on family development, family stress factors for workers in the field of emergency management, and so on.

There are many fascinating people-related topics in our field, such as:

Physical: the impact of stress on performance, causes for worker compensations claims, the impact of shifts on family, and worker health.

Emotional: the effects of post-traumatic stress syndrome on individual emotional well-being, the impact of effective communications on reducing stress factors, causes for worker burnout, and domestic problems in the affected worker’s home.

Behavioral: worker job satisfaction, job fulfillment, reducing worker depression and anxiety, and the comparison of the effects of command and control versus self-directed empowered teams.

Spiritual: how religious beliefs impact worker and victim success, and the impact of post-traumatic stress on individual religious beliefs.

OVERVIEW OF COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR (ORGANIZATIONAL AND GROUP)

Group behavior, in the context of emergency management, consists of many diverse topics. Emergency
management “businesses” are public or private enterprises that service a unique set of “customers.” These businesses can be a subset of governmental agencies or they can be businesses that sell services and products to the public and private sectors. A business of this sort focuses on segments of emergency management for selected population segments. Basically, organizations focus on factors such as the design, development, and implementation of response systems; sales of tools; techniques and strategies that assist in prevention: remediation; postevent recovery; and administration aids to improve relationships with other leaders, employees, sponsors, and stakeholders.

Leaders must be able to train their emergency management personnel to:

- create and support involvement in EM activities;
- participate in negotiations and influence others;
- develop effective communication and motivation skills;
- develop personnel policy and procedures;
- implement winning leadership, evaluation, coaching, and mentoring practices; and
- develop business skills, such as operational management, marketing and sales, and financial management.

When it comes to employee organizational behavior, we often do not examine organizational and group membership practices, such as how to be a good participant within an organization and how to create personal and professional growth environments. These skills are essential to good leadership. We do not often explore what and how group members can (and very often do) help their leaders. We do not often explore the development of relationships and their impact on the whole of the organization, both the leaders and the members together.

Emergency management units are normally composed of key individuals who have a vested interest in the organization or community. These organizational leaders (the chief of the police, commissions, and board members, for example) have an agenda and separate set of needs that hopefully fall into line with the direction of emergency management.

In order to have a successful emergency response unit, you must respond productively to emergencies and also meet the needs of the key individuals in the community, which means doing something for them and their agendas. This interrelationship requires that you involve these key individuals in strategy development, develop ways of influencing both individuals and organizations, effectively communicate with everyone involved, and develop excellent negotiation skills.

Finally, community issues and needs make up the last of the people-related aspects of emergency management. Some social-science journals include emergency management topics, such as the impact of emergencies on employee reduction, community well-being, community support for emergency management, and emergency management’s role in the community denial of terrorist threat. Psychological literature covers group behavior, while theological literature covers the spiritual needs and related behaviors of individuals. Collective behaviors are rich with questions and challenges for anyone thinking of the people-related aspects of our field.

**INVITATION TO READERS**

So, how will this column be focused?

This column is designed to meet your needs and will be based on open dialogue with you about your emergency management people-related concerns, suggestions about issues and topics of interest, and most importantly, the lessons you have learned.

Please contact me at NJSimon@incidentmitigation.com.

I am looking forward to the success of this, our dynamic and interactive column.

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