

Demonstrating Strong Leadership

Having strong leadership in the EOC is important, but especially when dealing with the death or serious injury of members of the community or first responders, as it can greatly affect the members in the EOC.

It is important to take a moment to recognize line-of-duty death immediately by, for example, taking a moment of silence to recognize the loss of life of an emergency responder. Failure to do so can increase the possibility of psychological impact and decrease the validity of the caring message.



The crisis leadership model **Be, Know, Do** can assist leaders in making high consequence decisions during a disaster:

- Be: the right person with good character
- Know: have situational awareness and know the concerns of all stakeholders
- Do: implementation on a timely basis

Providing Psychosocial Support Deploying ESS and DPS Volunteers

TSWs can provide psychosocial support to EOC members and frontline responders. Frontline responders are often working under very difficult conditions and may see disturbing sights and hear distressing sounds. Providing onsite responders with outside support is frequently overlooked by the on-scene commander. A TSW onsite can help ensure team members are looked after.

When a TSW is not available, other resources can be used to fill this role, for example, tactical advisors who have no operational responsibility.

Post-Event Debriefing & Continued Support

It is important to think about the physical and emotional state of community members and first responders affected by a disaster. Community members may have been evacuated and be outside in uncomfortable conditions and may be traumatized by the potential or actual loss of their home.

Emergency Social Services (ESS) and Disaster Psychosocial Services (DPS) volunteers should be proactively deployed to the scene to provide the services that the evacuees need.

Winter Blues Training Video Outline



Addressing the Psychosocial in Emergency Operations Centres

As the potential for disasters increase there is a need to develop practical tools and guidelines for first responders and those that provide psychosocial support.

What is Psychosocial Support?

Psychosocial Support focuses on enhancing individual resiliency and encouraging community recovery and adaptation following an emergency.

Psychosocial needs should be addressed in EOCs by a Team Support Worker (TSW).

Team Support Workers (TSW) or Disaster Psychosocial Services (DPS) Volunteers are those whose role it is to focus on the psychosocial needs of all responders, usually counsellors, social workers, or psychologists that are trained in disaster response.

A Team Support Worker ensures these key functions are performed in an EOC:

- Taking breaks
- Respecting gender and diversity
- Demonstrating strong leadership
- Providing psychosocial support
- Proactively deploying ESS and DPS volunteers to the community



Taking Breaks

EOCs are busy, stressful places to work and even though EOC members are distanced from the life-or-death decisions happening at the frontlines, they are still involved in major decisions that can impact the lives of large numbers of people.

The ongoing stress within the EOC environment can cause mental fatigue over time, making it much harder to focus and perform the duties required.

Taking a break can result in:

- Members coming back to the EOC temporarily refreshed
- Better decisions and more innovation
- Potentially finding solutions to previously unresolved problems

It is the EOC Director's responsibility to make sure breaks are scheduled, however it can be easy to forget when things become hectic. A TSW can help make sure breaks happen and ensure there is a quiet place for EOC members to relax, with plenty of water and nutritional food available.

When taking a break, EOC members should leave their work cellphone behind. You are not taking a proper break if the time outside the EOC is spent on phone calls.

A break provides an opportunity for EOC members to check in with family. If an EOC member's family has been directly impacted by the disaster, a TSW can assist in liaising with the family or if necessary, can assist the EOC worker in being temporarily freed from his/her duties to reunite with his/her family.

Using a buddy system ensures EOC members are looking out for one another. Buddies can look for

signs of fatigue or stress in each other and can encourage one another to take a break if needed. When buddies go on break together, they can check out their thoughts about the event with someone who understands what it has been like.

Respecting Gender and Diversity

EOCs are made up of both uniformed (police, fire, ambulance) and non-uniformed responders. The use of black humour by uniformed responders to cope with tragic and visually disturbing situations can be shocking to non-uniformed members of the EOC, which can impact them negatively.



Women or members who spend less time in Emergency Management roles may find it difficult to make their views heard and feelings of guilt can arise for these members due to not having been more forceful in expressing their views.

All EOC members, whether uniformed or non-uniformed, often have valuable suggestions to contribute towards the decision making process and these perspectives may be lost if they are not given the opportunity to speak.