

Module Seven

Management of Dead Bodies

Total hours needed – 06 hours

Total days needed - 01

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 - b. Recording information for dead bodies management and missing person
(Group Work and Presentation)

Management of Dead Bodies

Objective of this session

- To discuss need of management of dead bodies in disasters
- To introduce formats to be completed as part of management of dead bodies
- To share experience from a recent disaster in terms of managing dead bodies

Session Plan

Time	Topic	Methodology
15 minutes	Dead Bodies Management	Brainstorming
75 minutes	Concepts and steps in Dead Bodies Management	Power Point and discussion
60 minutes	Documentation for Dead Bodies Management	Discussion

Tools and Resources required

LCD projector, white board, flip chart, pens, body bag

Key Messages

- Need for dead bodies management in disasters
- Implications of non-management of dead bodies
- Requirements of management of dead bodies
- Experiences of management of dead bodies from Tsunami

Content

What is the need of management of dead bodies?

Participants will be asked to share their views about the need of Dead Bodies Management in Natural disasters. One participant from each table (or maximum of five participants) will share their views about the need of the DBM.

Emphasise that in any disaster the priority is to look after the survivors and not the dead bodies.

Concepts and Steps in DBM

In 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami only 10% of bodies could be identified. Consequently there were mass cremation and burial.

There are four main consequences of non-identification of dead bodies. These are psychological, cultural/religious, legal and administrative.

There is often a myth about risk of infectious disease from dead bodies. The most common misinterpretation/myth is that "dead bodies cause epidemics." The fact is that dead bodies do not cause epidemics after natural disasters. The same applies for dead animals.

There are infectious disease risks to body handlers, risk of injury and tetanus. There is a small risk, through contact with blood and feces, from Hepatitis B and C, HIV, Tuberculosis and Diarrheal disease. Therefore, it is very important to take safety precautions to about hygiene, gloves, boots, etc.

The **first step** in managing a dead body is body recovery. Many different people or groups are involved in this process. It may last for a few days or weeks, but may be prolonged if it is a mega disaster and there is less/no capacity. Sometimes it is easy to recover body but many-a-times it is a difficult thing due to bureaucratic procedures, condition of body, more than one claimant of same body.

There are procedures and methods of body recovery. Preferably, the bodies should be placed in body bags. Show the body bag and mention that its use will be demonstrated in the next session. The body parts (e.g., limbs) should be treated as individual bodies. Do not try and mix and match different parts to make a body. Always note the place and date where the body was found. It will help in its identification. Don't separate personal belongings from the remains of the body. It may help in identification. For example, a watch or ring can be recognised by a family member. It will facilitate identification of the body.

After the recovery, the **second stage is to store the body**. In hot climate the body must be stored within 12 to 48 hours as the body decomposes fast in this whether. If this is not done

and the body decomposition reaches an advance stage and becomes difficult to recognise even the face. Putting body in cold storage (or any other similar place/process) slows the rate of decomposition. It is important to put body in body bags, it helps to save the body parts and allow the body parts to stay together. Further waterproof labels should be put on the body which will help to retain the important information about the body.

There are different ways to store the dead bodies. It depends upon the availability of equipment, human resources, infrastructure, place, etc. For example, body can be put in refrigerator and temperature must be maintained between 2-4 degree Celsius. This is the best option. Secondly, refrigerated transport containers can be used for storing bodies. There are some alternative storage options also such as temporary burial, dry ice and ice.

After the recovery and storage, the third step is the identification of dead bodies. The sooner it is done the better it is. It can be done through visual identification or photographs of fresh bodies. This is an easy process but sometimes it becomes quite difficult to recognise because of changes in the body due to time, whether, etc. Beware of visual recognition as sole method for identification of human remains! It can be useful, but also misleading...Example of a famous Hollywood film heroine (Marilyn Monroe); the same person before death and few hours after death.

In many cases visual identification is not possible. At this time we have to use forensic procedures, for example, finger prints, dental records and DNA.

Identification follows a step wise procedure. To start with attribute a unique reference number to the bodies by putting labels on bodies. Each body or body part must be given a unique number, that is, no other body or part can have that number. For example, one way to name the body is to follow PLACE-NAME OF TEAM MEMBER & TEAM NO-NUMBER (Dehradun-NicolasT1-001). It is mandatory to put label showing this unique number.

Taking photograph is mandatory if equipment is available. Take photograph of whole face, whole body, upper body and lower body if possible. Put unique identification number on body or body part at the time of taking photographs.

Recording details is mandatory. It should include general information like unique id number, person reporting, recovery detail, etc.). Secondly, it should have physical details

like general condition, apparent sex, age group, physical description, hair description (head, facial, body, etc.) and distinguishing features. It is important to document associated evidence like clothing, footwear, eyewear, etc. It is also important to mention recorded information, identity and status of body as part of records.

Information collection about missing persons

At times there is no information about our near and dears after the disaster. In such cases these people are considered as missing persons. This information is to be collected using a form.

The form has information on the unique identification number, personal details (name, address, age, etc.), circumstances that led to disappearance, physical details (ht, wt), type of clothing, footwear, eyewear, etc.

Long-term storage and Disposal of Dead Bodies is needed for remaining unidentified bodies for burial. This is the most practical method to preserves evidence for future forensic work (if required). Another way to dispose the dead bodies is cremation but most evidence are destroyed during cremation.

The family members and relatives of dead and missing persons need support. The priority for affected families is to know the fate of their missing loved ones. For this they need Psycho-social support, Cultural and religious aspect and Material support.

Formats to Recording information of dead bodies and missing persons

Divide the group into two. Ask one group to review the form for management of dead bodies and other group to review form of missing persons. In the plenary ask if there are any doubts on understanding of format.

Documenting – Dead bodies and missing persons’ information

Objective of this session:

- To understand how to complete information collection for dead bodies
- To understand how to complete information collection for missing persons

Session Plan:

Time	Topic	Methodology
30 minutes	Recap of steps involved in recording information for dead bodies and missing persons	Discussion in plenary
45 minutes	Preparation for recording information for dead bodies management and missing persons	Small group exercise
15 minutes 15 minutes	Presentation for recording information for dead bodies management Critique	Role play
15 minutes 15 minutes	Presentation for recording information for dead bodies management Critique	Role play

Tools and Resources required

White board, flip chart and pens

Key Messages

- Use of dead bodies bag
- Recording information for management of dead bodies
- Recording information for missing persons

Content

Recap and steps required for recording information for management of dead bodies and missing persons.

A Scenario

After the earthquake of 7.9 Richter scale in state G in 2010, taluka Y was devastated. In the taluka Y, the infrastructure was devastated. Most of the houses cracked due to earthquake. In many cases, the ceiling came down.

As per authorities as many as 700 people lost life. They also reported 50 people were reported missing.

Only 250 dead bodies were identified. The remaining bodies/body parts have not been identified.

The authorities have asked the Red Cross movement to support in the management of dead bodies and missing persons.

Divide the group into two. In each group

- Nominate a person as NS RFL Coordinator.
- Nominate a person as Govt representative.
- Nominate a person as ICRC RFL Manager

Ask **first group** what they will do for the management of dead bodies. Prepare a role play and demonstrate. After the role play the second group will critique on the role of first group about the management of dead bodies.

Ask the **second group** to what they will do for missing persons. Prepare a role play and demonstrate. After the role play the first group will critique on the role of second group about the management of missing persons.

Resource Material:

1. PowerPoint Presentation '1. Management of Dead Bodies after Disasters' (for the entire session)