



MANAGEMENT OF MASS FATALITIES

ESF # #6 – Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Housing and Human Services Annex **- as defined in the Emergency Response Framework**

ESF Coordinator - Department of Homeland Security / Federal Emergency Management Agency

Note: This section of the plan contains no specific tactical information and simply outlines the procedures that could potentially be followed during a disaster or critical incident. All actions outlined in this plan may not necessarily be followed in every situation.

VANCE COUNTY EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN **Updated: January 11, 2009**

I. PURPOSE

This section outlines the procedures to be followed when a disaster results in mass fatalities to the extent that the number of dead exceeds the resources of the local medical examiner's office.

II. ORGANIZATION

By law, County Coroner/Medical Examiner is responsible for the dead. The State Disaster Mortuary team if requested and if available as well as other local funeral service personnel, when activated, will be able to assist under the direction of the County Coroner/Medical Examiner.

III. SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

Any major disaster may result in extensive property damage and possibly a large number of deaths which may require extraordinary procedures.

IV. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

- A. The Disaster Mortuary teams focus is to establish the means and methods for the sensitive respectful care and handling of deceased human remains in multi-death disaster situations. The team will be available to aid in the necessary acts of evacuation, identification (Sanitation and preservation such as a preparation or embalming as authorized), notification of the next of kin, counseling and facilitating the release of identified remains to the next of kin or their representative under the direction of authorized persons.
- B. When disaster conditions permit, and an estimate can be made of the dead, temporary morgue sites will be selected and activated. Remains will be recovered and evacuated to the temporary morgues for identification purposes and safeguarding of personal effects

found on the dead. Necessary information about each victim will be compiled and processed for the medical examiner/coroner. When authorized by officials and the family, mass fatalities team shall prepare, process and release the remains for final disposition.

- C. As an assist group to the medical examiner/coroner, the local funeral directors will provide needed supplies, equipment, vehicles and personnel as available. The state funeral director's association may also assist in identifying other necessary resources.
- D. Only when registered burial sites are exhausted, losses are massive, and as a last resort, should interment be in burial areas selected by local, county and/or state officials.

V. DIRECTION AND CONTROL

- A. Operations will be coordinated by the Coroner/Medical Examiner working with the Emergency Operations Director, and where designated, the Disaster Mortuary response team's coordinator.
- B. When a disaster occurs, the County Coroner/Medical Examiner should immediately contact the state funeral directors association through its offices or through staff members. They, in turn, will notify the appropriate members of the mortuary response team.

VI. TEMPORARY MORGUE SITE

- A. A morgue site is to be selected, organized, and put into operation if the number of dead exceeds the resources of the Coroner's office. Once a morgue site has been selected, the medical examiner/coroner or the designated mortuary response team coordinator will organize its operations and assign personnel to some or all of the following jobs: uniformed guards, information clerks, counselors, interviewers, telephone communicators, admissions clerk, general supervisor, identification personnel, orderlies, personal effects custodian, embalming supervisor, embalmers, secretaries, inventory clerk, distribution clerk, etc.
- B. The temporary morgue should be located as near as possible to areas with heavy death toll and should have: showers, hot and cold water, heat or air conditioning (depending on climate), electricity, drainage, ventilation, restrooms, parking areas, communication capabilities, and rest areas. It should be fenced or locked for security of remains and personal property, should be removed from public view and have sufficient space for body identification procedures. It should also be subject to partitioning for separation of functions such as body handling, x-ray, autopsy, records maintenance, interviewing, etc. The functions carried out at each morgue site will be determined by the circumstances.

VII. MASS BURIAL GUIDELINES

- A. Mass burial may become necessary when the number of remains cannot be managed and become a public health concern, or when remains cannot be adequately refrigerated or embalmed, identified or processed in an acceptable manner.
- B. Any decision to begin mass burial must be made at the highest levels of state government. Their direction will be essential before such effort can be initiated for the public health, safety and welfare.
- C. The location of any mass burial site must also be agreed upon by the above agencies, taking into consideration the number of remains to be buried, distance and transportation considerations. Plans should include the probability of exhumation at a later time.

VIII. CREMATIONS

Cremations should not take place for a minimum of seven (7) days after the last body has been processed. Cremation should never be used as a form of disposition for unidentified remains of tissue. Religious considerations as well as the possibility of future identification affect this decision.

IX. REMAINS NOT RECOVERED

Conditions and circumstances sometimes preclude the recovery of remains in spite of exhaustive efforts and resources expended by those involved. Once the determination has been made that one or more remains are unrecoverable, non-denominational memorial services should be arranged. All efforts should be made to notify and include the surviving family members in this service. Assistance in post-death activities should be extended to the surviving family members. The family should be given the opportunity to select the locale of the non-denominational service if so desired.