



Management of Dead Bodies after Disasters: A Field Manual for First Responders



**Pan American
Health
Organization**

Regional Office of the
World Health Organization



**World Health
Organization**



ICRC



**International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**

Management of the dead is one of the most difficult aspects of disaster response. It has profound and long-lasting consequences for survivors and communities. Globally, disasters claim thousands of lives each year. However, care of the deceased is often overlooked in disaster planning and the absence of guidance for first responders has recently been highlighted following several large disasters.

Immediately after a major disaster, identifying and disposing of human remains are often done by local communities. Forensic specialists may not be available or unable to rapidly access the affected area. There are simple steps that first responders can take to ensure the dead are treated in a dignified way and that can assist in their identification.

This *Field Manual for First Responders* presents simple recommendations for non-specialists to manage the recovery, basic identification, storage and disposal of dead bodies following disasters. It also makes suggestions about providing support to family members and communicating with the public and the media.

This manual will be useful during the immediate response to a disaster and where forensic response is unavailable. Furthermore, it will be useful for those preparing mass fatality disaster plans. The recommendations are relevant for local, regional and national authorities as well as for non-governmental organizations.

The principles outlined in this document are being implemented and promoted by a variety of organizations, including the Pan American Health Organization, the World Health Organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

This document can be viewed on Internet at:
www.paho.org/disasters (click on Publications Catalog)



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