

The major disasters that have taken place throughout history, despite their origin, have one thing in common: the enormous number of people killed. Hurricane Mitch in Central America, the floods in Venezuela, earthquakes in El Salvador, hurricanes in the Caribbean, and disasters caused by humans such as the Mesa Redonda fire in Peru, the supermarket fire in Paraguay, wars, plane crashes, among many others, have taught us important lessons on the subject of mass fatalities. Despite the efforts of experts, the lack of information and deeply held but erroneous beliefs continue to cause unacceptable practices in managing dead bodies in disaster situations.

The Pan American Health Organization invited a broad range of experts to compile this manual, which analyzes the role of the State in coordinating and carrying out the processes of managing dead bodies, which, along with the assistance provided to disaster survivors and the maintenance of basic services, is a fundamental part of disaster response.

This manual provides the technical information needed to support State authorities in the proper management of dead bodies, taking into account the following principles:

- The body of a person killed as a result of a disaster does not pose a risk for infection;
- Mass graves should never be used for burying disaster victims;
- Under no circumstances should mass cremation of bodies take place when this goes against the cultural and religious practices of the affected population;
- Finally, it is necessary to exhaust every effort to identify the bodies, and as a last resort bury unidentified corpses in individual niches or graves. This is a basic human right of surviving family members.

This manual should be of interest to specialists in disasters and in management of human remains, and especially national or local authorities who are responsible for ensuring that bodies are treated in a dignified manner and that the human rights of those affected by disasters are respected.

This publication is available on the Internet at:
www.paho.org/disasters



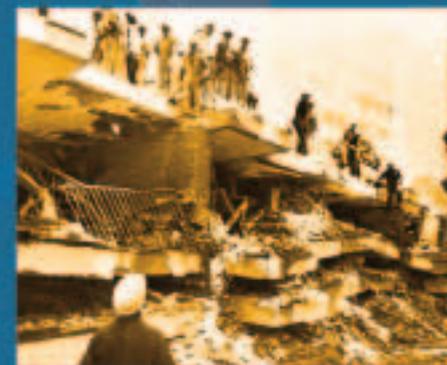
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Management of dead bodies in disaster situations

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