

DISASTER RECOVERY AND CLEAN UP

There is no placating Mother Nature. Often unpredictable, her ferocity takes many forms: earthquake, flood, hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires. Once her fury is spent, the work of recovery begins. Getting back to normal as rapidly and safely as possible is the goal - a goal that is always better achieved with a recovery plan in place.

Recovery work is dangerous work, further complicated by the push to get it done swiftly and the fact that many of the employees are quickly hired and insufficiently trained to work in the high-hazard areas that can result from a disaster. Moreover, the hazards faced by recovery teams are not of the normal, every-day variety.

The unique hazards found on a recovery site can include animals, such as rodents, insects and reptiles. Recovery workers may have to deal with animal and human remains, work around and with heavy equipment, use hand and power tools, manually handle materials of all kinds, and function in a toxic or uncomfortable environment that includes dust, heat and cold, confined spaces, lead, asbestos and chemical exposures, downed electrical lines, and work zone traffic.

To guard their safety, workers must be provided – immediately and efficiently – with the knowledge, skills and equipment they need to get the difficult and complex job of recovery done.

Begin by identifying the tasks each worker is expected to perform and the conditions under which they will perform them. Identify the hazards associated with those tasks, and then determine and provide the proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) required. (PPE can include face shields, gloves, protective clothing, protective footwear, hearing protection, respirators and hardhats.) The standards for providing the proper fit and usage do not change because of a



compressed time frame or the extreme nature of the work. On the contrary, the high probability and constancy of exposure after a disaster make it even more imperative that workers are properly fitted for PPE and sufficiently trained in its use.

By the same token, safety training for employees is essential. Many recovery workers will be performing unfamiliar tasks in strange locations while suffering intense stress and fatigue – a recipe for disaster. OSHA fact sheets and “QuickGuides” can help. Print them directly from the OSHA website and review with employees. Make them more durable by laminating them or at least placing them in sheet protectors. Creating an employee handbook that



includes these publications and posting these materials in high visibility locations is also strongly recommended. Click [here](#) to access OSHA Fact Sheets and [here](#) to access OSHA Publications .

Mother Nature is capricious and not every contingency can be planned for, but if your agency, company or organization is likely to be involved in the recovery efforts from a natural or manmade disaster, advance planning, preparation and training will go a long way to ameliorating the difficult recovery operations that must follow.

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