

Stress in the Workplace

Disasters bring with them many unfamiliar and stressful situations and persons who need to be dealt with. These demands can be very distressing to disaster victims. Practice owners and shelter managers are at greatest risk of these stresses because they are faced with conflicts between caring for themselves, their families, their business, and their employees.

The kinds of demands that arise include the following examples:

- Insurance adjusters who want to settle immediately and reduce their costs
- Police, fire, and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) officials who want explanations and launch investigations
- Distraught clients, worried employees, and concerned family members who all want to know what to do next, whether their pets are safe, or if a paycheck can still be expected

Veterinarians and staff also may feel detached from the clients they enjoy working with every day. These are real existential needs, and the decisions that have to be made can also affect whether a family's children can still be fed or attend college.

Employees should be protected as much as possible from hazards and additional stress and trauma. To facilitate this, employees should be directed to secured areas where they can congregate. It is best if these facilities are indoors with small rooms that are monitored to prevent unwanted visitors and the press from gawking at the victims. Employers, managers, and other persons in authoritative positions in a company should visit with the employees to boost morale and ensure that everything is being done to speed physical and emotional recovery. Some simple techniques for helping employees cope with stress are summarized in Table 12-10. Rumors must be dispelled, and professional help may be sought to assess the potential psychologic damage to victims. The American Red Cross and professional mental health counselors are good sources of help in these situations.

Table 12-10 Some simple stress coping language

Reassuring things to say to employees who have been affected by a disaster	Questions to ask employees affected by disasters at work
You are safe now	How were you involved in the incident?
It is over now	
You survived	What did you see, hear, experience?
You are experiencing a traumatic stress reaction	Are you injured in any way?
It is normal to show reaction, let it out	What do you need?
The animals are OK	

From Paulk D: *Providing psychological first aid*, Santa Ana, Calif, 1998, Disaster Resource Guide.