EMERGENCY AND DISASTER RESPONSE WORKERS: MANAGING AND PREVENTING STRESS

COMMON REACTIONS TO A DISASTER INCIDENT
- No one who responds to a mass fatality incident is untouched by it.
- Profound sadness, grief, and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event.
- You may not want to leave the scene until the work is finished.
- You will likely try to override stress and fatigue with dedication and commitment.
- You may deny the need for rest and recovery time.
- We each have different needs and different ways of coping.
- Acknowledging our feelings helps us recover.

SIGNS THAT YOU MAY NEED STRESS MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE
- Difficulty communicating thoughts.
- Difficulty remembering instructions.
- Difficulty maintaining balance.
- Uncharacteristically argumentative.
- Difficulty making decisions.
- Limited attention span.
- Unnecessary risk-taking.
- Tremors/headaches/nausea.
- Tunnel vision/muffled hearing.
- Colds or flu-like symptoms.
- Disorientation or confusion.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Loss of objectivity.
- Easily frustrated.
- Unable to engage in problem-solving.
- Unable to let down when off duty.
- Refusal to follow orders.
- Refusal to leave the scene.
- Increased use of drugs/alcohol.
- Unusual clumsiness.

WAYS TO HELP MANAGE THE STRESS
- Limit on-duty work hours to no more than 12 hours per day.
- Make work rotations from high stress to lower stress functions.
- Make work rotations from the scene to routine assignments, as practicable.
- Use counseling assistance programs available through your agency.
- Drink plenty of water and eat healthy snacks like fresh fruit and whole grain breads and other energy foods at the scene.
- Take frequent, brief breaks from the scene as practicable.
- Talk about your emotions to process what was has been seen and done.
- Stay in touch with your family and friends, if possible spend time with them.
- Participate in memorials, rituals, and use of symbols as a way to express feelings.
- Pair up with a responder so that you may monitor one another’s stress.

* When to seek help: If self-help strategies are not helping or you find that you are using drugs/alcohol in order to cope, you may wish to seek outside or professional assistance with your stress symptoms.