

The Response to September 11: A Disaster Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: The response to 9/11 continues into its 14th year. The World Trade Center Health Program (WTCHP), a long-term monitoring and treatment program now funded by the Zadroga Act of 2010, includes >60,000 World Trade Center (WTC) disaster responders and community members ("survivors"). The aim of this review is to identify several elements that have had a critical impact on the evolution of the WTC response and, directly or indirectly, the health of the WTC-exposed population. It further explores post-disaster monitoring efforts, recent scientific findings from the WTCHP, and some implications of this experience for ongoing and future environmental disaster response.

Findings: Transparency and responsiveness, site safety and worker training, assessment of acute and chronic exposure, and development of clinical expertise are interconnected elements determining efficacy of disaster response.

Conclusions: Even in a relatively well-resourced environment, challenges regarding allocation of appropriate attention to vulnerable populations and integration of treatment response to significant medical and mental health comorbidities remain areas of ongoing programmatic development.

Key Words: disaster response, environmental disaster, 9/11, post-disaster health surveillance, World Trade Center

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INTRODUCTION

The response to 9/11 continues into its 14th year. More than 60,000 World Trade Center (WTC) responders and community members ("survivors") participate in the World Trade Center Health Program (WTCHP), a long-term monitoring and treatment program now funded by the Zadroga Act of 2011. Here we review key aspects of the response to 9/11 that have affected the health of the exposed population, subsequent monitoring efforts,

recent scientific findings from the WTCHP, and some implications of this experience for ongoing or future environmental disaster response.

THE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO THE WTC DISASTER: COORDINATION AND SITE SAFETY

The extremely chaotic conditions at the WTC site challenged the coordination of rescue and recovery efforts there. The New York City Office of Emergency Management (OEM), headquartered at the WTC, lost its entire command center. This was a major blow to the city's overall emergency response. The OEM was the intended coordinator of emergency response among ~150 agencies. OEM employees were forced to evacuate in the early hours of the disaster. Many telephone, power, and computer lines were down. The police had closed off lower Manhattan, making it difficult for officials to get past checkpoints without badges.

These circumstances also complicated the federal government's ability to respond to environmental and safety concerns. The Federal Emergency Management

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September 11 A Case For The Higher Purpose

Victor M. Corman



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