

Critical Incident: Toxic Chemical Spill Scenario

One August afternoon in a rural eastern North Carolina town (pop. approx. 20,000 residents) a train carrying tanker cars of chemicals derailed in the center of town. Before emergency disaster personnel knew what was contained in the tanker cars, many people within a mile or so of the accident become ill with flu-like symptoms from the toxic fumes. Officials of this small rural town had to wait about two hours before Federal Officials could identify exactly what chemicals were being transported by this train. The local hospital emergency department was in chaos because of the overwhelming number of local residents being transported there for emergency medical treatment of some unknown toxin. Fortunately, there were no related deaths; only some lingering upper respiratory effects from the exposure to the chemicals.

At the time of the accident, a local daycare facility was swimming at the local public pool close to the downtown area. In all the confusion and chaos during the train derailment, one particular 4 year old child who could not swim was left unattended for a very brief period of time (less than one minute). Sadly, little Leslie drowned. You have been called-in to provide mental health disaster relief to this rural community 4 days after this toxic spill. Discuss and role-play the following:

1. Discuss the characteristics of such a critical incident (e.g., transportation disaster, socio-cultural aspects, existing county/town infrastructure, time of day or month of event, duration or intensity of this weather event, effects of media coverage).
2. Discuss the types of losses that individuals in this rural community have sustained.
3. Anticipate and discuss some of the familiar feelings/emotions, thoughts, or stories, that you would expect to encounter after such an incident.
4. Who might be the persons most affected (emotionally, behaviorally, physically, cognitively, and spiritually) by this critical incident (e.g., populations such as elderly or disabled, children, family members, friends, fire fighters, police, paramedics, rescue personnel, other surrounding support systems, daycare facility workers).
5. What coping mechanisms and resiliency factors would you want to assess/evaluate and facilitate with this community?

Role Play Scenario:

{Discuss how you might set-up or arrange your crisis intervention. Role play one-on-one with partner each taking different roles- if time allows role-play Group Crisis}

- Town Mayor
- Emergency Service Personnel (Fire Fighters, Paramedics, Police)
- Parent with child in Daycare setting
- Lifeguard on duty at time of drowning
- Director of Daycare Facility and Teachers
- Parent of "Little Leslie"
- Director of Parks, Pools, & Recreation
- Create your own role