



Physical Anthropology Section – 2007

H67 An Argument for the Increased Involvement of Forensic Anthropologists in Mass Fatality Incidents in the United States, United Kingdom and Europe

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain a clearer understanding of the role of forensic anthropologists in mass fatality incidents and the importance of having forensic anthropologists on national DVI teams, federal DMORT teams and private companies involved in mass disaster management.

This presentation will have an impact on the global community with regards to the role and use of forensic anthropologists in mass disasters. This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by looking at the comparison and contrasting role of forensic anthropologists in the U.S., UK, and Europe.

In any disaster, there is always an outpouring of forensic professionals prepared to go into a disaster to recover the remains, conduct postmortem examinations and identify the victims to ensure their return to the families. These 'standard' forensic identification teams include the usual specialties like Forensic Odontology, Forensic Pathology and DNA specialists. However, forensic anthropologists, depending upon the geographical location of the disaster, are not always called upon or utilized to assist in the recovery and identification process of victims.

In the United Kingdom (UK), the role of the forensic anthropologist in a mass disaster is limited. The UK depends upon its national Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) teams which are staffed mainly by police officers. Forensic anthropologists are only called upon when requested but are not specifically attached to any particular team. In contrast, the federal Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT) teams or private companies like Kenyon International Emergency Services, Inc. retain forensic anthropologists on a contractual basis as part of the forensic identification teams in the United States.

Globally, disasters like aviation crashes, hurricanes and tsunamis kill hundreds of people of all ages, races and ethnic backgrounds. A forensic anthropologist is trained to examine the minutest fragment of bone and develop a biological profile in order to help in the confirmation of positive identification. It is essential that a forensic anthropologist be part of the team in order to process the fragmentation of bones.

The science of forensic anthropology is a proven, essential and required discipline in a mass fatality incident. In today's society there is a moral and ethical responsibility to provide all resources and technology needed to identify an individual following a disaster no matter how large or small. Forensic anthropology must be a recognized and required discipline not only in the U.S. and UK, but in all countries that deploy DVI teams or forensic identification teams during a mass fatality disaster.

Mass Disaster, Mass Fatality Incident, Forensic Anthropology