



Physical Anthropology Section – 2009

H65 Training the National Disaster Victim Identification Team

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have an understanding of the reasons why the training for the National Disaster Victim Identification Team was established within a United Kingdom university and how this training has helped to move the United Kingdom to the forefront of mass disaster preparation.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by giving those at the forefront of the response to mass disasters another perspective on how training can help to prepare teams for these unexpected and often devastating events.

The Centre for Anatomy and Human Identification at the University of Dundee hosts the advanced course in Disaster Victim Identification for the United Kingdom police. The 500 officers who have completed this course continue on to become members of the National DVI Team. The course offers a postgraduate award in DVI for those who complete the program successfully.

Each mass disaster occurs through a unique set of circumstances and, therefore, requires an individual, tailored response. Every disaster response shares the need to identify those who have lost their lives during, and as a direct result of, the disaster. The identification of the victims of any disaster is vital for both legal and ethical reasons and helps to provide closure for those families that have been affected. Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 the police in the United Kingdom are considered to be one of the primary responders to any disaster involving British nationals and, as such, form the core of any multidisciplinary team whose efforts are aimed at furnishing the identities of those who have died, both nationally and internationally. Other members of the team can include, as required, pathologists, odontologists, and anthropologists. In the past, training for the police has fallen to officers who have gained experience during a response to a previous disaster. This has resulted in a tendency to train as if responding to that most recent disaster, and has also led to a gradual loss of skills through the retirement of those officers. The Centre for Anatomy and Human Identification has moved away from this approach by providing a course which not only aims to produce a cadre of omni-skilled officers, but which also allows police officers to train alongside the specialists, such as the pathologists and anthropologists with whom they will be deployed.

The immediacy of response to these disasters, which is driven by the unexpected nature of the incident, means that police officers must be prepared and trained to the highest standards. This training must be consistent, robust, and fit for purpose. The events of 2005, which included the aftermath of the Asian Tsunami, the London bombings, hurricane Katrina, and the Pakistan earthquake, underlined the need for a recognized group of police officers who would be able to respond to disasters both abroad and on the United Kingdom mainland. In the United Kingdom a cadre of 500 officers has been identified who will form the National DVI team in the event of a deployment. These officers are chosen from all of the police forces in the United Kingdom and proportional representation allows for all of the forces to take an equal share in the provision of officers. The Centre for Anatomy and Human Identification at the University of Dundee provides core training for those officers who have been identified as members of the National United Kingdom DVI Team and who would be required to respond in the event of both national and international disasters. This training also brings together the specialists who would make up the DVI team in the event of a disaster, allowing these two disparate but essential groups of professionals to meet and develop skills together.

Disaster Victim Identification (DVI), Training, Police