



### F10 Haiti Earthquake 2010: DMORT Response

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After attending this presentation, attendees will have an understanding of the mass fatality incident response to identify American citizens who died in the aftermath of the 2010 Haiti earthquake.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by reviewing the challenges faced in the first international DMORT mission to identify American citizens in a joint effort between the U.S. Department of State, Department of Defense, and Department of Health and Human Services.

On January 12, 2010 a powerful earthquake measured at 7.0 on the Richter scale hit Port-Au-Prince, the capitol city of Haiti. According to estimates, over 222,570 people were killed, 300,000 were injured, and 1.3 million people were displaced. Estimates also stated that 97,294 houses were destroyed and 188,383 houses sustained damages. Both the physical and political infrastructure was seriously impaired.

An estimated 45,000 American Citizens were in Haiti at the time of the earthquake. Those included dual-national citizens, aid workers, multinational corporations' employees, embassy staff, and military personnel.

The U.S. Embassy in Port-Au-Prince served as the central hub for the accounting of American Citizens. During multiple press briefings over the course of the next several weeks, the United States Department of State reported evacuation and recovery efforts to the media. International medical and food aid efforts were hampered by the damage to both the seaport and the airport.

Family members in the United States grew increasingly concerned regarding the health and welfare of their loved ones in Haiti as the fatality numbers grew. Under the direction of the U.S. Department of State, in communication with the government of Haiti, a joint mission was established to recover, identify, and repatriate remains of U.S. citizens. Organized under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, within the National Disaster Medical Services, the first international mission of the Disaster Mortuary Operational Response teams was undertaken.

A *Family Assistance Center* opened in Miami, Florida to take the reports of those concerned family members within the United States. Those reports, sent to Haiti, would begin an *Investigative Element* that potentially would lead to a *Recovery Element*. Recovered remains would be processed by the *Morgue Operations*. Approximately 4,100 reports were generated, but 90% were unfounded by the ensuing investigations. Operations were combined between DMORT members and soldiers in the U.S. Army 11<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Company (Mortuary Affairs), 49<sup>th</sup> Quartermaster Group out of Fort Lee, Virginia. Elements of the U.S. Army 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division provided security during recovery operations.

The most significant site of recovery efforts, due to the concentration of American Citizens' living quarters, focused on the Hotel Montana. The five-story 145-room, terraced hotel perched atop a mountain, collapsed in a pancake fashion. Excavation was painstakingly slow.

Deployed DMORT members, staged first in Atlanta, received medical clearances as well as briefings regarding the risks associated

with the Haiti Earthquake mission. Diseases, uncommon in the United States but endemic in Haiti, included malaria, dengue fever, tuberculosis, anthrax, HIV, hepatitis B, lymphatic filariasis, and typhoid fever. Essentially, the warning was "if you have a medical emergency, you will die" due to the austere conditions.

The morgue compound was juxtaposition to the Port-Au-Prince airport, consisting of numerous tents with generators providing electricity. The morgue consisted of two tents in an "L" formation. The admitting tent had stations for data input, personal effects processing, photography, and radiology. The main tent had stations for pathology, anthropology, odontology, DNA sampling, and fingerprinting. The morgue operations processed 121 sets of human remains, identifying 119 individuals. About 50% were returned to the United States and 50% were interred in Haiti. Estimation was made that no more than 400 U.S. citizens were left in mass graves. The government of Haiti would not allow any recovery from mass gravesites.

The Demobilization Rotation had the responsibility of taking down the Morgue Compound. Inventorying, disassembly, cleaning, and packing of morgue components prior to inspection by U.S. Customs was required. Equipment to be sent back to the United States was loaded into containers for transport via ships. Some equipment, such as tents, was donated to USAID. Partial pallets of disposable supplies such as hand sanitizer were donated to the Miami University field hospital.

#### Haiti Earthquake, Mass Fatalities, DMORT