G20 Development of Preliminary Field Morgue Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT) Entry/Triage Flow Protocols Initiated on a Coordinated Field Training Exercise (FTX) Between the Suffolk County, New York, Medical Examiner's Office and the Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team (DMORT) 2 (10/2/14, Revisited)

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware of the early design parameters and problems which arose and were addressed when initiating a non-radiological/nuclear (non-rad/nuc) field morgue entry/triage and HAZMAT area and flow on a coordinated multi-agency field training exercise.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by emphasizing considerations which need to be addressed when initiating a basic flow design for a non-rad/nuc HAZMAT field morgue entry and triage operation in a mass fatality event.

The proper handling of hazardous materials early during the recovery of remains and morgue processing is crucial for optimum safety and protection. This has to be implemented at every step down the line to the field morgue. The intake, triage, and HAZMAT decontamination (decon) of remains must predictably provide safety and protection, from the earliest stages of recovery to the reception and intake of remains.

On September 28, 2014, the Suffolk County Medical Examiner's (SCME) Office participated with Islip Airport Fire Rescue in their annual airport drill conducted on the grounds of Islip Airport (MacArthur Field, NY). The scenario simulated a crash on takeoff of a commercial jet with aviation fuel contaminating the remains. Fuselage fragmentation was reported, and the presence of severed bodies, some commingled Human Remains (HR) on the plane and field, and burnt remains were reported. Emergency plans would have identified the Army Aviation Support Unit's Facility as the medical examiner's operation area. In conducting this drill, SCME worked closely with the Army and utilized their hanger adjacent to the airport property. Components of this drill occurred at the actual crash site and the field morgue. The multi-agency response was coordinated with the county's HAZMAT Unit, which was composed of civilian, law enforcement, and fire-service members. The HAZMAT Unit was used to decon the mannequins as they were delivered to the hanger's temporary morgue. In addition, drill participants had to be prepared for possible biological and Improvised Explosive Device (IED) threats. The most important drill objectives were the safety and accountability of participating members. The drill objectives included the following: (1) review of Incident Command System (ICS) forms and protocols; (2) participants follow the chain of command, accountability, and safety rules; (3) effective coordination and interaction between federal (DMORT), state (Army Aviation Unit), and local SCME and Fatality Response System (FRES) participants; (4) documentation and recovery of five field mannequins; (5) admission, triage, and numbering of at least ten mannequins; (6) initial HAZMAT Team decon of at least three mannequins as they were delivered from the field to the temporary morgue operation; (7) appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was utilized at each station; (8) electronic collection and transmission of data; and, (9) establishing clear lines of communication between FRES and ME/DMORT staff.

The following work assignments were appointed: (1) establish a triage area adjacent to the HAZMAT area; (2) examine HR pouches that arrive from the crash scene before they enter decon; (3) ensure each pouch contains only one individual HR — separate the comingled remains as needed; (4) assign a unique and individual ME number for each HR before decon; (5) function as an Subject Matter Expert (SME) for HAZMAT teams; (6) admission and triage table positioned at the entrance to the hanger morgue area; (7) triage will receive pre-packaged HR pouches; (8) pouches will be opened, photographed, and the contents will be documented with special emphasis on assigning an individual ME number to HR as identified and potentially identifiable; (9) separate non-human remains to be transported to morgue; and, (10) ME number will be issued by team documentation unit.

The drill, as in most staged events, started with initial delay and confusion; however, early flexibility and smoothly shifting the original Incident Command System (ICS) assignments as required resulted in a successful exercise. All personnel acted as a seamless, effective unit. The initial flow schematic developed from the basic (rough) outlay to a more detailed outlay as the day progressed. An after-action submission of the final flow-chart design is presented as a model developed from the drill results that may be adopted for future drills. This has been submitted to the local SCME Office. At the conclusion of the event, the four groups assembled in a work area and established a workable action plan to enter, triage, number, decon, and process HR while maintaining a strict chain of custody and command.

HAZMAT, Triage, Flow

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