



POSITION STATEMENT

All-Hazard Preparedness: The Occupational and Environmental Health Nurse Role

INTRODUCTION

As a nation, America is faced with the on-going threat of terrorist activity from individuals and groups throughout the world and at home. In response to this reality, it is critical that steps be taken in the workplace to prevent acts of terrorism where possible, and be prepared to minimize adverse effects of terrorism that cannot be prevented. It is essential that traditional emergency preparedness planning systems, utilized to manage emergencies internal to an organization, be enhanced to provide a framework for management of both internal and external emergency events. To do this, an all-hazard preparedness approach is recommended.

The events of September 11, 2001 provided a graphic picture of the multi-level impact of an emergency event in the workplace. From the airline passengers and crews to the workers in the buildings attacked, to the rescue workers involved in the emergency and on-going response, this was a workplace emergency event. One lesson learned from the event is the need for an ongoing plan that fosters seamless multidisciplinary, interagency response.

Historically, the occupational and environmental health nurses' (OHNs) role in the workplace has included responsibility for emergency preparedness and disaster planning. Today, AAOHN believes OHNs are uniquely qualified to be key professionals in all-hazard preparedness, possessing the skills, knowledge, and experience to develop, manage, and implement an all-hazard preparedness program in both the workplace and the larger community.

RATIONALE

The vision statement of the American Association of Occupational Health Nurses, Inc. (AAOHN) states, "Work and community environments will be healthy and safe." To achieve this vision, the OHN has an evolving role in the response needed to address hazardous situations, depending on the type and location of the event. Two critical features of an effective all-hazard preparedness program are workplace and community surveillance, and the building of relationships among all community and organizational response resources. The OHN should be prepared to perform multiple levels of response, both in the planning process and in the emergency event itself.

Initially, OHNs use their knowledge of workplaces to review and expand current workplace emergency preparedness plans to all-hazard plans, incorporating an awareness of the potential for natural, technological and human hazards. Within the workplace, OHNs' roles vary from direct care as the first responder to emergency preparedness plan coordinator.

Secondarily, OHNs participate in a vulnerability assessment of potential hazards for the community surrounding the worksite and preparation of a hazard preparedness plan to address the larger community response to an event. Within the larger community plan, proactive leadership roles include liaison with community organizations, community surveillance activities, identification of needs for communication, and education, and presentation of educational activities. During an event, the OHN, working with other professionals, will move through the stages of emergency management from initial threat assessment, identification of response options, and response plan development. Post event

roles include coordinator, gatekeeper, leader, and communicator.

On a tertiary level, the OHN is a key player in the identification and management of delayed reactions to hazards, helping workers to overcome trauma from the event and return to productive lives through counseling and referral to community resources. In addition, OHNs are instrumental in improving future responses through data analysis and on-going community planning.

CONCLUSION

The American Association of Occupational Health Nurses believes it is the responsibility of occupational and environmental health nurses to assume leadership roles in preparing the nation to

meet current and future threats to the workplace as well as the community.

REFERENCES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). *Preparedness for All Hazards*. Retrieved from www.Emergency.cdc.gov/hazards-all.asp

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