

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of: *Disaster Victim Identification: Experience and Practice*

REFERENCE: Black S, Sunderland G, Hackman L, Mallett X, editors. *Disaster victim identification: experience and practice*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2011, 248 pp.

Disaster victim identification (DVI) is obviously a critical component of managing a mass fatality event. In some respects, the perceived success or failure of the response will be judged on the efficiency, accuracy, and overall professionalism of the decedent identification process. As mass fatality events cannot be anticipated and are almost certain to be chaotic, contingency planning and training of personnel is a crucial component of disaster preparedness. This includes postmortem aspects (body recovery and postmortem data collection), antemortem aspects (collection of appropriate missing person data), and interactions with those affected by the tragedy. The material included in *Disaster Victim Identification: Experience and Practice* was largely developed from essays submitted as part of an advanced mortuary training course for the U.K. DVI response capability developed and run at the Centre of Anatomy and Human Identification, University of Dundee. In essence, these are some of the essays that were completed by law enforcement officers as part of their disaster preparedness training. This edited book details 18 mass fatality events, which occurred in the United Kingdom spanning from 1966 until 2005. The mass fatality events include natural, accidental, and terrorist disasters.

The stated intent of the book is to present these historical incidents in order for the reader to learn about DVI. The book contains 16 chapters. The first chapter provides a brief discussion of DVI and an overview of the book's contents. Fourteen of the subsequent chapters each cover a specific mass fatality event, and one chapter focuses on four different rail disasters. Each disaster case study presents a synopsis of the incident including such things as historical details, lead personnel, causes of the disaster, response capability,

identification efforts, and postincident impacts such as safety recommendations and legislated changes. While the book's title may imply that the content focuses specifically on victim identification, it is in reality a much broader recounting of events pertaining to specific disasters.

Although the book is filled with incident-specific details, it lacks a thorough overview of best-practice recommendations associated with DVI. The first chapter of the book is the only place that general DVI components are discussed. In this cursory chapter, specific disaster management phases are mentioned that include: preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. It is under the response phase that the authors include victim recovery and identification, which they describe as consisting of body recovery, antemortem data collection, postmortem data collection, victim identification, and debriefing. Only about two pages of the chapter address these "big picture" topics associated with mass fatality preparation and deployment. The rest of the book focuses specifically on case examples. While the level of detail is extensive for some facets of each disaster, the challenges and intricacies associated specifically with victim recovery and identification are often only touched upon. In general, the content of the chapters is mostly fact-based (who, what, when, where) as opposed to a critical evaluation of the event.

While *Disaster Victim Identification: Experience and Practice* succeeds in presenting case overviews of a wide array of mass fatality events that occurred in the United Kingdom, it should not be seen as a "how to" manual on DVI. For those experienced with mass fatality management, this book provides interesting and concise historical overviews of specific incidents from which certain "lessons learned" may be gleaned. Those with less experience hoping to use this book as a training or reference manual on DVI methods will likely find it lacking in procedural guidance.

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