

Common disaster misconceptions

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Dead Bodies

- It is commonly accepted that the presence of dead bodies will generate massive epidemics.





Mass burials

- Health (the fear of disease) has been the main justification for massive burials or cremations after disasters.
- Mass burials have a strong negative impact on the population and authorities:
 - Mental health (mourning)
 - Legal and financial (inheritance, insurance . . .)
 - Cultural
 - Human rights (right to identity)

The facts

- There has never been a report of a large epidemic, even after disasters with a large number of deaths such as the tsunami in Southeast Asia.
- Mass burials can be avoided.
- The main issues in the management of large number of dead bodies are:
 - they are not a source of communicable diseases;
 - the right to identity

What to do?

- Preserve all objects and other elements that can help in the identification of the victim.
- Every step must be taken to avoid the decomposition of bodies.
- Even when there is a large number of dead bodies, they must receive a minimum of individual attention.
- Trench: Laying down bodies side by side is one of those basic measures.

Conclusions

- Dead bodies can cause contamination, but haven't been reported to start epidemics.
- Dead bodies must receive individual attention.
- When identification is not possible, refrigeration is the first alternative, trench the second.
- Mass pit burials are unjustified.

Thank you

