

Finally, make sure all the information can be easily seen and updated by the PSTs working the floor. While the inclination is to put everything in some type of CAD notation, this may not be the optimal choice because the PST will have to scroll through all of the documentation to ascertain what information is the most accurate or correct. An information board that can be clearly seen by all of the PSTs or a simple piece of paper may be better alternatives.

## STRESS

Stress can take a toll on more than those directly exposed to the event.

A quick “war story” illustrates the point. While I was employed at my former agency, the Pulse Nightclub tragedy occurred. I, fortunately, was not working at the time of the event. While I was driving into work the following day, I found myself with tears streaming down my face and the imagery of the firefighters marching into Ground Zero after the World Trade Center Towers had collapsed flashed across my mind. I asked myself why I was crying since I did not work the event or know any of the victims. My answer was simple. Yes, I felt great sorrow for the victims and their grieving families, however, I felt extremely guilty that I was not in the proverbial trenches with my friends and colleagues. We can never predict how anyone is affected by an event. It is important to be sensitive to the needs of all employees and ensure that an agency’s after-care services are available to everyone.

Shortly after the event, consider the possibility of a staff exodus. This could be true not only for those who worked the event, but could even for tenured employees who may feel they can no longer be subjected to such high levels of stress.

## AFTER-ACTION REPORTS

While all agencies complete an after-action report (titles will vary) on a large-scale incident, consider a separate report strictly for the communications division. Typically, the entire agency’s report will not go into intimate detail with suggestions for improvements and kudos for communications. For example, the agency’s report might say the communications division needs to update its call handling guide. A report written by the communications division might give specific CAD codes or signals that need to be updated to correspond with large-scale incidents. While completing a communications-specific report, ask for everyone’s feedback regardless if they worked the event. Someone who did not work the event might be able to give a different perspective than those who were on duty at the time. Do not be afraid to share the report. No person or agency is perfect. We all learn from each other in this field. Your agency’s lessons learned and suggestions for improvement can make a significant impact on our field.

## PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

It is extremely important to have written policies and procedures not only for the incident itself but that address all the points

above. While we practice simulations for what occurs during an event, we also need to practice for what occurs after an event. An easy way for multiple agencies to form multi-jurisdictional policies is to have a tabletop exercise to identify some of the issues that are not yet addressed, and then go back to the respective agencies to confer with command staff before a final standard operating procedure is written.

Finally, if there are personnel that will supplement communications’ staffing (i.e. personnel from a neighboring agency or from a different division) ensure there is ongoing training for them on any new software or policies within the communications center. By including them in the ongoing training, it will help them seamlessly help the division during an event.

## CONCLUSION

While preparing for the aftershock can be daunting, a well-prepared agency can relieve the stress levels of the agency’s PSTs and serve its internal and external customers more effectively. ●

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