

# Letter to the Editor

Efforts to reduce the stress exposure risks to emergency personnel in operational situations are no longer optional. Legal requirements and proactive risk management initiatives have insisted on approaches which recognise the duty of care required. John Lunn's article (AJEM, Winter 2000) provides a good overview of factors such as emergency worker selection, appropriate management policies and the issues relating to work schedules and fatigue factors.

This article has also queried the usefulness of stress debriefing. I was pleased to note the author discussed the importance of not having stress debriefing as a stand alone initiative. Many critics fail to hear this message and isolate the debriefing protocol from other support activities, when key recommendations relating to this area advocate that stress debriefing be used as a part of an overall Critical Incident Stress Management initiative.

The author cites a study by Bisson et al, as being critical of stress debriefing

as an effective post trauma technique. I believe this research has no relevance to the needs of emergency personnel post incident. The Bisson study used a technique, originally intended as a group support strategy with individuals. I question just how much we can infer from the individual debriefing of accident victims to the group debriefings of trained emergency workers? Are we comparing apples with oranges?

Criticisms of stress debriefing continually fail to address a number of questions. What was the debriefing protocol used? How were the facilitator's trained? Were the facilitators matched for experience, methodology and consistency of approach? How much control did the study have over when a debriefing took place? This is important because the timing factor seems to be a major issue.

Another major issue is the use of the generic term 'debriefing'. Most of the critical research has ignored definitions of the methodology, and provided

results which have led to the criticism of all forms of debriefing. If all references to the protocols and procedures followed were avoided, one could also use the same approach to demonstrate that counselling doesn't work, then extend the results to all forms of counselling in all circumstances. Having facilitated many stress debriefings following critical incidents, for emergency workers, security guards, bank employees, miners and offshore rig workers, I believe strongly in their value when the following conditions apply:

- they are used appropriately
- they are part of an overall support initiative
- they are facilitated by someone who knows what they're doing
- they follow an appropriate protocol
- they are sanctioned and endorsed by the organisation.

Michael Tunnecliffe  
Clinical Psychologist

## Disaster Events Calendar

January 2-5, 2001  
Plymouth, U.K

### *Coping with Catastrophe: Innovation and Integration*

Royal Geographical Society/Institute of British Geographers

'This session of the annual RGS/IBG conference will explore contemporary issues in the construction and distribution of risk and vulnerability in urban and rural contexts. Papers draw from physical as well as human geographical traditions and especially from interdisciplinary approaches and address issues of integration and innovation in methods or in the presentation of findings.'

**Contact:**

Mark Pelling  
Department of Geography  
University of Liverpool  
email: pelling@liverpool.ac.uk  
or Stephan Harrison  
Department of Geography  
Coventry University  
email: s.harrison@coventry.ac.uk

February 12-16, 2001  
Auckland, New Zealand  
*Cities on Volcanoes 2*

**Organisers:**

Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences,  
Auckland Regional Council, Massey  
University, University of Auckland, and the  
International Association of Volcanology and  
Chemistry of the Earth's Interior.

**Contact:**

Secretary  
Cities on Volcanoes 2  
Wairakei Research Centre  
Private Bag 2000  
Aupo, New Zealand  
phone: 64 7 374 8211  
fax: 64-7-374 8199  
email: citiesonvolc2@gns.cri.nz  
www.gns.cri.nz/news/conferences/cities.html

March 19-April 6, 2001  
Melbourne, Australia

### *HELP 2000 — Health Emergencies in Large Populations Course*

**Sponsors:**

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), American Red Cross, and Pan American Health Organization.

**Contact:**

International Committee of the Red Cross  
GEN\_SAN Help Courses, 19, avenue de la Paix

1202 Geneva, Switzerland  
phone: 41 22 730 28 10  
fax: 41 22 733 96 74  
email: pperrin.gva@icrc.org  
email: azogopou@nat.redcross.org.au  
www.icrc.org

April 24-25, 2001  
Boston, Massachusetts

### *CPM (Contingency Planning and Management) 2001.*

**Sponsor:**

Contingency Planning and Management Magazine  
Contact Alicia LoVerso  
Conference Coordinator  
WPC Expositions  
84 Park Avenue  
Flemington, NJ 08822  
phone: 908 788 0343 (ext. 154)  
Fax: 908 788 9381  
www.ContingencyPlanExpo.com

May 9-12, 2001  
Lyon, France

### *12th World Congress on Disaster Medicine.*

**Organiser:**

World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine

# Disaster Events Calendar

**Contact:**  
WDCEM 2001  
1 rue de la Banniere  
69003 Lyon, France  
Fax: 33 04 72 60 92 89  
email: wcdem2001@aol.com  
www.wcdem2001.org, or  
http://pdm.medicine.wisc.edu/pdmcalendar.html

**May 21-24, 2001**  
San Diego, California

## **2001 Technology Partnerships for Emergency Management Workshop and Exhibition**

**Sponsors:**  
Federal Emergency Management Agency and others.

**Contact:**  
Dr. Brenda-Lee Karasik  
phone: 619 553 2101  
email: brenda@spawar.navy.mil  
Mr. Dale Gurley  
phone: 619 553-5630  
email: gurley@spawar.navy.mil  
www.foundation.sdsu.edu/technologysolutions.

**June 3-8, 2001**  
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

## **Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM) 25th National Conference**

The Association of State Floodplain Managers is an organisation of professionals involved in floodplain management, flood hazard mitigation, the National Flood Insurance Program, and flood preparedness, warning and recovery. The group has become a respected voice in floodplain management practice and policy in the United States because it represents the flood hazard specialists of local, state and federal government, the research community, the insurance industry, and the fields of engineering, hydrologic forecasting, emergency response, water resources, and others.

**Contact:**  
ASFPM  
2809 Fish Hatchery Road  
Suite 204  
Madison, WI 53713-3120, USA  
phone: 608 274 0123  
fax: 608 274 0696  
email: asfpm@floods.org  
www.floods.org/conf-aus.htm

**June 17-22, 2001**  
Newport Beach, California

## **Eighth International Conference on Structural Safety and Reliability (ICOSSAR '01)** (Includes sessions on hazards analysis, earthquake engineering, wind engineering, and other hazards-related issues.)

**Organised by:**  
International Association for Structural Safety and Reliability.

**Contact:**  
ICOSSAR '01 Secretariat  
University of Colorado

College of Engineering and Applied Science  
Campus Box 422  
Boulder, CO, 80309-0422 USA  
phone: 303 492 7006  
fax: 303 492 0353  
email: corotis@colorado.edu -or- icossar@usc.edu  
www.colorado.edu/engineering/ICOSSAR

**Mid-2001**  
Washington, DC

## **Second World Congress on Natural Disaster Reduction**

**Sponsor:**  
American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)  
This meeting is in the formative stages

**Contact:**  
Walter Hays  
ASCE  
1801 Alexander Bell Drive  
Reston, VA 20191  
phone: 703 295 6054  
email: whays@asce.org

**July 2-6, 2001**  
Eindhoven, The Netherlands

## **Third European and African Conference on Wind Engineering**

**Contact:**  
3EACWE Congress Office  
Eindhoven University of Technology  
P.O. Box 513  
5600 MB Eindhoven  
The Netherlands  
fax: 31 40-2458195  
email: congressoffice@tue.nl  
www.bwk.tue.nl/bwk/events/3eacwe

**August 7-10, 2001**  
Seattle, Washington

## **International Tsunami Symposium 2001 (ITS 2001)**

Submit abstracts on-line or by e-mail not later than September 1, 2000.  
See [www.pmel.noaa.gov/its2001](http://www.pmel.noaa.gov/its2001) for complete instructions and additional information, or contact E.N. Bernard  
NOAA/PMEL  
7600 Sand Point Way N.E.  
Seattle, WA 98115-6349  
phone: 206 526-6800  
fax: 206 526-4576  
email: bernard@pmel.noaa.gov

**August 19-24, 2001**  
Washington, D.C.

## **First World Congress on Disaster Reduction**

**Sponsors:**  
American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) and others.

**Contact:**  
Walter Hays ASCE  
1801 Alexander Bell Drive  
Reston, VA 20191  
phone: 703 295-6054  
email: whays@asce.org; or

Michael Cassaro ASCE  
e-mail: macass@aye.net

**August 28-September 1, 2001**  
Helsinki, Finland

## **Fifth European Sociological Association Conference**

This meeting will incorporate several proposed sessions of the 'Disaster and Social Crisis Research Network' (see announcement p. 63). Sociologists and other social scientists who are interested in making a presentation in one of these sessions should submit an abstract of not more than 250 words, no later than January 31, 2001, to the respective session coordinators. Further information available at: [www.anglia.ac.uk/geography/d&scrn/](http://www.anglia.ac.uk/geography/d&scrn/)

**September 4-6, 2001**  
Malaga, Spain

## **Third International Symposium on Earthquake Resistant Engineering Structures (ERES 2001)**

**Contact:**  
Susan Hanley  
Conference Secretariat  
Wessex Institute of Technology  
Ashurst Lodge  
Ashurst, Southampton, SO40 7AA, U.K.  
phone: 44 0 238 029 3223  
fax: 44 0 238 029 2853  
email: shanley@wessex.ac.uk  
www.wessex.ac.uk/conferences

**September 9-12, 2001**  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

## **International Public Works Congress and Exposition**

Includes educational sessions on emergency management issues.

**Contact:**  
American Public Works Association  
2345 Grand Boulevard  
Suite 500  
Kansas City, MO 64108-2641  
phone: 816 472 6100  
fax: 816 472 1610

**September 10-14, 2001**  
Brno, Czechia

## **Fourth Moravian Geographical Conference on Nature and Society in Regional Context**

**Organisers:**  
Institute of Geonics, Czech Academy of Sciences  
'Disasters and Their Natural and Social Consequences' is one of the conference topics.

**Contact:**  
Antonin Vaishar  
Institute of Geonics  
P.O. Box 23  
613 00 Brno, Czechia  
fax: 4205 578031  
email: vaishar@geonika.cz  
or visit the website at: [www.geonika.cz](http://www.geonika.cz), password CONGEO Conference