
Effects of Trespasser Accidents on Railroad Workers- A Mental Health Perspective

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Trespasser Incidents at Amtrak

- Average between 30-35 per month
- Employee Groups Affected
 - Engineers
 - Conductors
 - Road Foreman, Trainmasters, Amtrak Police
 - Maintenance-of-Way Employees (Track workers)
- 3-5 affected employees on most crews
 - >100 employees affected each month
- Affect on Passengers
 - Potential exposure to trauma
 - significant delays



Bea Peterson-Photo

Employee Reactions to Trespasser Incidents-Physical

Physical Reactions:

- Gastrointestinal issues (nausea, vomiting, stomach pain)
- Poor appetite
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Racing heart
- Sleep Disturbances
- Minimal to no reaction

Cognitive/Psychological Reactions:

- Hypervigilance
- Anxiety, fear
- Irritability, anger
- Tearfulness
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Rumination
- Self-Blame, shame
- Re-experiencing the critical incident
- Feelings of helplessness
- Decrease in ability to concentrate
- Resilience



Behavioral Reactions:

- Avoidance of reminders of incident
- Alcohol or drug misuse/abuse
- Isolation
- Positive coping mechanisms (reaching out to others, exercise, volunteer work, getting back in the saddle)

Mental Health Problems Associated with Critical Incidents

- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Acute Stress Disorder
- Depression
- Substance use disorders
- Exacerbation of pre-existing conditions



Complicating Factors

- Multiple incidents
- Life stressors
- Identification with victim
- Management response
- Local Authorities handling incident
- Memorials set up at scene
- Depositions



Photo-Urban Hikers

Program Features:

Prevention

- Prevention component as part of regular training

Support

- Availability of relief from shift and transportation to home terminal
- Peer program
 - Partner with unions
- Additional relief from duty as needed

Intervention

- Contact from EAP Counselor
 - Referrals to trauma specialists as needed

