

Post disaster temporary memorialising: psychosocial considerations for disaster managers

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Temporary memorialising after community crises is 'the rule, rather than the exception' (Eyre 2007¹). Participation in collective memorialising provides people affected by crisis with a safe space to express their grief, shock and sadness. It can also be an important first step for people in the grieving process (Rosenblatt 1997²).

In 2017, in Australia and around the world, there has been many examples of temporary memorialising after sudden and unexpected critical incidents. Examples include the flower tributes to those injured in killed in Bourke Street, Melbourne after a car rampage through the streets in January, the Manchester Arena bombing in May, the Grenfell Tower fire in London in July and the mass shooting in Las Vegas among others.

Despite the predictability of temporary memorials, their occurrence and evolution is rarely considered in emergency management. In many cases they are considered a problem that needs to be managed rather than a tool for supporting the recovery of the community. In addition to the rushed logistical and planning implications for emergency managers, there are implications for community healing as well as the psychosocial wellbeing of those working to manage temporary memorials.

Recent research builds on the findings from my 2016 Churchill Fellowship report and looks at practical considerations for disaster managers, government workers and others who may find themselves managing temporary memorials after a critical incident.

The paper examines themes of:

- temporary memorials will occur
- temporary memorials occur at, or near, the site of the disaster
- memorial items are emotionally laden
- messaging is influenced by social media
- moving and removing temporary memorials
- preservation of temporary memorials
- roles of preservers.

The paper proposes five guiding principles for disaster managers when dealing with temporary memorials. These are:

- be inclusive
- be supportive
- be respectful
- be consultative
- plan removal.

Conclusion

Post disaster memorialising is an integral part of community recovery. Temporary memorials become important sites of hope, social connection and recovery for people directly affected and the broader community. Planning for collective memorialising needs to be integrated into post disaster recovery planning. It also demands taking a psychosocial approach to the planning, management and preservation of both temporary and permanent memorials alike, to ensure the positive, long term recovery of individuals and community.

¹ Eyre A 2007, *Remembering: Community commemoration after disaster*. In Rodriguez, H, Quarantelli EL & Dynes RR (Eds.), *Handbook of Disaster Research*, pp. 441-455, New York.

² Rosenblatt 1997, cited in Eyre A 2007, *Remembering: Community commemoration after disaster*, *Handbook of Disaster Research*, pp. 441-455, New York.

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