

Death and Accident Cleanup

Helping Families in Their Time of Need

by Allison Hester

Last week, the world watched in horror as every parent's worst nightmare came true, as a gunman murdered young children in their classrooms. As families and communities try to make sense of this tragedy, they cling to the hope of someday resuming some sense of normalcy. And the cleaning industry is a key, yet unseen player in the efforts to make that hope a reality.

Death – whether from natural, accidental or malicious circumstances – is messy. When families lose loved ones, the last thing they want to deal with is figuring out how to clean up afterward. This is what led David O'Brien to start Rapid Responders 10 years ago.

O'Brien, who at the time worked transporting bodies for a crematory, recalled a particularly brutal transport call. When the grieving family asked the first responders who would clean up the mess, the responders "shrugged their shoulders."

This led O'Brien to research the situation. begin researching the options for families. What he found was that not only was there a large need for death and accident cleanup, there were strict, and often confusing laws about disposing of bodily fluids. Yet families were generally left to figure it out for themselves.

The need for cleanup services was great, and has only gotten bigger. Tighter regulations have prohibited practices that were once



deemed acceptable, such as firefighters cleaning outside accident scenes and washing the bodily fluids down the sewer.

"First responders had to start calling people like us to come out, decontaminate it, remove it and simultaneously capture the water so it doesn't go into the waterways. It has to be reclaimed," he said.

There is a great need for death accident cleanup services, and for those who can handle it, there is money to be made. In fact, there is such a need for these cleaning specialists, O'Brien is working to put unemployed and disable individuals back to work. "Why make \$25 to \$50 an hour when you can make \$250 to \$1,000 an hour?" he asked.

"The Worst of the Worst of the Worst"

Eight years ago, O'Brien opened the CTS Decontamination Training Academy in Las Vegas, which combines web-based training, followed by two "strenuous, vigorous eight-hour days" of on-site training in Las Vegas. The two-day onsite training is done in an actual house that is made to look like a death scene. There, students are fitted for respirators, then must decontaminate, clean, remove and dispose of all the remnants of the scene, bringing it back to its preexisting condition.

"We put blood splatter everywhere – ceilings, doors, walls, floors – put live and kicking, juicy maggots crawling," said O'Brien. "The

nice thing about the hands-on training is we make it as real as possible. So if someone cannot handle the training, they won't be able to handle the real thing." And the real thing involves "the worst of the worst of the worst" imaginable.

Safety is a key issue that is focused on throughout the training. "We train on the OSHA safety standards, ladders, extension cords, hand tools, cutting tools, heat stress – it's all about safety, and a lot of it are things people don't normally consider," O'Brien added.

Additionally, students are taught about marketing their services, including O'Brien's "unconventional" marketing techniques that are proprietary and "very effective."

Following the hands-on training, students take a final exam. If they pass, they receive their certification. If they fail, they can retake the training and exam at a later date.

Not for Everyone

While the money is "very good," this is obviously not an industry for everyone. To be successful in this industry, you've got to possess several characteristics:

1. The Stomach: Contractors entering this field obviously need to be able to stomach blood and other bodily fluids, maggots, decomposition and indescribable stench. They also have to be able to work wearing respirators and full protective suits.

2. The Schedule: Death and accident cleanup is a 24/7 business. "We're just like the first responders," said O'Brien. "We get a call and we are there in 20 minutes or less, weather and traffic permitting." So if you are not able or willing to handle such a schedule, this is not the industry for you.

3. The Equipment: While death and accident cleanup is about much more than just pressure washing, the correct pressure washing system is imperative to ensure that bodily fluids do not go down the drain. They also have to be powerful enough to remove



baked on blood and other fluids from hot concrete, then have reclaim capabilities. O'Brien said that he refers his students to Jerry McMillen of Cleaning System Specialists for his instant capture reclaim systems.

4. The Persistence and Diligence:

While this field pays well, getting paid can be complicated. In fact, O'Brien stressed that billing is the most difficult part of this industry. "We are dealing with insurance companies and they don't want to pay. We deal with municipalities who call us out to clean up, but when it's time to get paid they say that the City has no money," he added.

5. The Psyche: More than the ability to endure the blood itself, O'Brien stressed that you have to be able to handle the story behind the blood. "You're dealing with a lot of tragedies on a daily basis, and it takes a toll on you psychologically," he stressed. "It gets to me at times. The psychological aspects of this job are horrific."

6. The Heart: "If you're in it just for the money, then don't bother," O'Brien stressed. "When we do it, we do it because we want to help individuals during the worst moment of their life. It's not our job to tell them they have to pay up front or we won't come. It's our job to assure them that we are on our way and it will be ok."

If you believe you have what it takes to enter this industry and are interested in learning more about CTS Decontamination Training Academy, visit their website at www.cts-decontamination-academy.com.