18.1: Introduction

Learning Objectives

- Describe the nurse’s role in promoting environmental health
- Identify environmental hazards and risks in the community and globally
- Explain nursing roles in disaster planning, emergency preparedness, and emergency response
- Apply principles of triage
- Outline tips for preventing and managing stress for disaster responders

Since the early years of the profession, nursing leaders such as Florence Nightingale and Lillian Wald have recognized the role of nurses in controlling the influence of environmental factors on health. Nurses have long appreciated that a healthy environment impacts the physical and mental health of individuals, families, communities, and populations.\(^1\)

At some point during their career, nearly every nurse finds themselves caring for individuals affected by exposure to an environmental hazard or disaster. Disasters have environmental, physical, and psychological effects on individuals and communities. The increasing impacts of natural, man-made, and infectious disease disasters have changed health care and nursing perspectives around the world. Nurses are on the front lines in supporting individuals and communities affected by disasters. This chapter will review nurses’ roles in promoting environmental health and treating individuals exposed to environmental hazards, as well as participating in emergency preparedness and disaster response and recovery.