On the COVER

Collateral Damage

First Responder Perspective by Kester Franklin Dingus, EMT-I,
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Sometimes as first responders we tend to forget that there are people affected during an incident other than the patients we are attempting to help. Initially for us, it may be just another call, just another patient, or, in the case of the Virginia Tech shootings, many patients. In such large incidents, our emotions tend to be overriden by the enormous task at hand. We must quickly process a tremendous amount of information and make many quick decisions. However, as was true in this tragic event, many times there are those who are not physically sick or hurt but who nonetheless are greatly affected by the events that have happened. Emergency responders may not always realize that these types of incidents are a totally foreign experience for most of the people involved. Most likely none of these individuals have had any contact with the multitude of first responders and the sights, sounds, and smells that accompany an event of this magnitude. Once this realization happens, we begin to be more cognizant of those "other victims" around us, and we want to help them as well. We realize that people deal with grief and anger in many different ways, and that some may turn to their faith to get them through this difficult time, whereas others may obtain comfort and support by being around those associated with the incident or who may have experienced similar loss. All of us want somehow to be involved and to do something, anything, to achieve a sense of usefulness and closure. Many of us want to remember the victims in specific ways, perhaps through laying a display of flowers, placing a stone marker, or making a financial donation. As the flags in this photograph illustrate, each of us, whether we are patients, first responders, family, friends, or neighbors, wants to feel connected to each other, and to be reminded that in our own way we too became victims during these tragic circumstances.