
LESSON 5. ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

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Lesson 5. Ethical Decision Making

Lesson Objectives

At the end of this lesson, the participants will be able to:

- Describe how ethical considerations impact decision making.
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Scope

- Introduction
 - What Are Ethics?
 - Scenario Activity: Train Derailment
 - Components of Ethical Decision Making
 - Action Review Activity
 - Applying the Problem-Solving Model
 - Ethical Considerations
 - Summary and Transition
-

Methodology

Instructors will define ethics and the characteristics of ethical dilemmas, and then will use a train derailment scenario to illustrate an ethical issue.

Next, instructors will describe how to solve ethical dilemmas, including through ethical commitment, ethical consciousness, and ethical competency, and describe several ethical do's and don'ts. Finally, instructors will identify considerations involved when resolving ethical dilemmas.

Materials

- PowerPoint visuals 5.1 – 5.19 and a computer display system
 - Instructor Guide
 - Student Manual
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Lesson 5. Ethical Decision Making

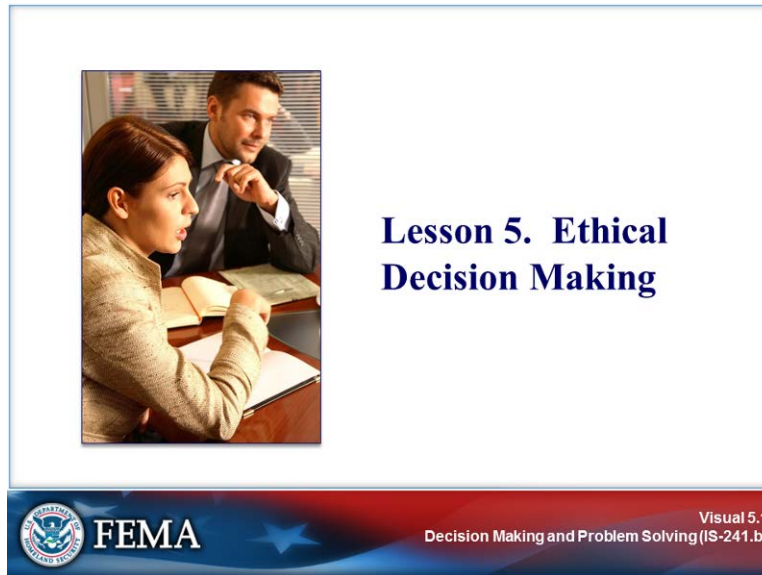
Time Plan

A suggested time plan for this lesson is shown below. More or less time may be required, based on the experience level of the group.

Topic	Time
Introduction	5 minutes
What Are Ethics?	5 minutes
Scenario Activity: Train Derailment	15 minutes
Components of Ethical Decision Making	5 minutes
Action Review Activity	15 minutes
Applying the Problem-Solving Model	5 minutes
Ethical Considerations	5 minutes
Summary and Transition	5 minutes
Total Time	1 hour

INTRODUCTION

Visual 5.1



Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

In this lesson, you will explore what it means to make ethical decisions, and consider a framework for approaching ethical situations.

INTRODUCTION

Visual 5.2

Lesson 5 Objective

- Describe how ethical considerations impact decision making.



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Visual 5.2
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

At the end of this lesson, the participants will be able to:

- Describe how ethical considerations impact decision making.

INTRODUCTION

Visual 5.3

A Professional Responsibility



- Members of the public and coworkers count on you to carry out your responsibilities professionally.
- Public officials must avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

**FEMA**Visual 5.3
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

As an emergency management professional, you represent your organization and your profession. Your actions must instill trust and confidence in those with whom you work and in those who depend on you for assistance. In an emergency, victims and coworkers must be able to count on you to carry out your responsibilities in a professional and fair manner.

What's at Stake?

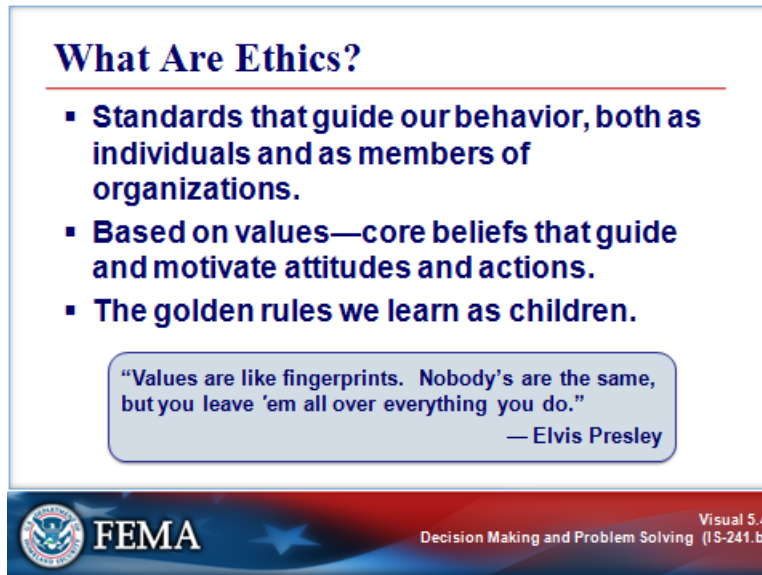
At stake in ethical situations arising from emergencies are the following:

- Your personal reputation,
- Your agency's reputation, and
- Ultimately, the public's trust in local government's ability to do the right thing.

Also, it is not enough to do the right thing. Public officials must avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

WHAT ARE ETHICS?

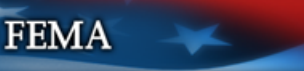
Visual 5.4



What Are Ethics?

- Standards that guide our behavior, both as individuals and as members of organizations.
- Based on values—core beliefs that guide and motivate attitudes and actions.
- The golden rules we learn as children.

“Values are like fingerprints. Nobody’s are the same, but you leave ‘em all over everything you do.”
— Elvis Presley

 **FEMA**  **Visual 5.4**
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Answer the following discussion question: **What is ethics?**

Ethics consist of a set of standards that guide our behavior, both as individuals and as members of organizations. The ethical principles for this discussion are simple standards of right and wrong that we learn as children (the “golden rules”), such as being honest and fair and treating others with respect.

WHAT ARE ETHICS?

Visual 5.5

Raising the Stakes

A poor decision with ethical implications can escalate an emergency into an unmanageable situation.



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Visual 5.5
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Emergency situations can transform routine decisions into higher profile turning points with serious ethical implications.

A poor decision with ethical implications can escalate an emergency into an unmanageable situation as the emergency response progresses.

WHAT ARE ETHICS?**Visual 5.6**

Characteristics of Ethical Dilemmas

Examples:

- **Uncertainty about the consequences**
- **Rule book does not apply**
- **No good options**
- **Disagreement, with no time for consensus building**



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Visual 5.6
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

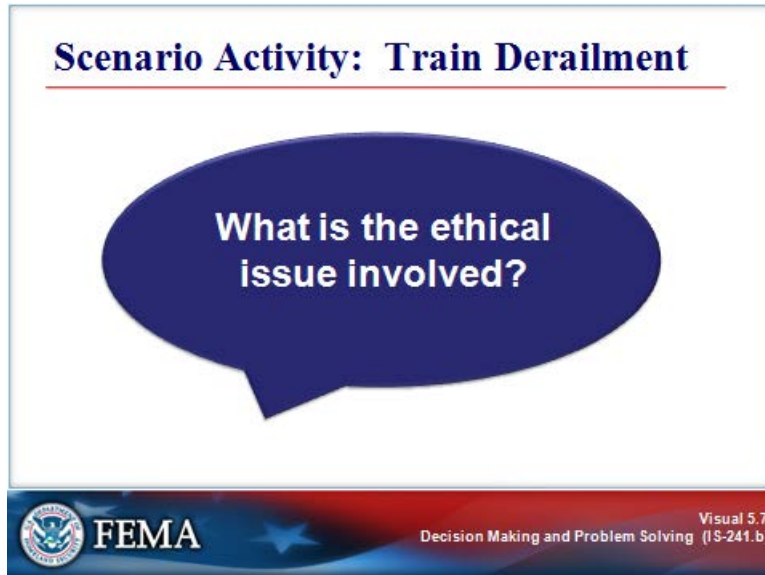
The difference between ordinary decision making and ethical decision making is the nature of the problem to be solved.

The following circumstances are examples of situations where ethical dilemmas often arise:

Circumstance	Description
Uncertainty About the Consequences	Making decisions is difficult when we are uncertain if our actions will work, especially when the decision could cause negative consequences, such as someone being hurt.
Rule Book Does Not Apply	Applying rules takes some skill in interpreting the intent. As much as following the rules can be limiting, it is often more difficult to make a tough decision when there is no legal precedent, no clear policy guidance, or no established procedures.
No Good Options	When none of the options is a clearly positive choice, decision making is particularly difficult. In this case, the lesser of the two in terms of negative consequences frequently is the better option.
Disagreement, With No Time for Consensus Building	Often there is strong disagreement among coworkers, stakeholders, or the community about the best course of action, in conjunction with limited time to build consensus. Ethical decisions may end up being lose/win or lose/lose decisions rather than win/win.

SCENARIO ACTIVITY: TRAIN DERAILMENT

Visual 5.7



Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Purpose:

This activity will provide an opportunity for you to examine some of the ethical issues that can arise during an emergency.

Instructions:

1. Read the scenario that follows.
2. Answer the question that appears after the scenario.
3. Be prepared to share your answer with the group.

SCENARIO ACTIVITY: TRAIN DERAILMENT

Visual 5.7 (Continued)

Scenario: Train Derailment

On April 17 at 10 a.m., a train carrying 25 propane tankers derailed and began to burn. After an initial evaluation, the incident commander ordered an immediate evacuation of the community, telling evacuees the evacuation was “precautionary” and to expect it to last not more than 2 or 3 hours. After 4 hours, the incident commander, in consultation with Emergency Operations Center personnel and chemical experts, determined that the evacuation should continue until the fire burns out. People who were away from home when the fire started are now returning to the area and want to rescue their pets.

What are the ethical issues involved in this scenario?

Instructor Notes:

For this scenario, the principal ethical issue involved is: Given the current level of risk, can the incident commander ethically allow community members to return for their pets?

Participants may have identified additional issues, such as:

- Did the incident commander do the right thing by ordering an immediate evacuation? Should he have waited for more information before issuing the order?
- Should the incident commander have worded the evacuation order more strongly and ordered evacuation of pets as well?
- Should persons not at home when the fire started be allowed to rescue pets within a limited time window or not at all?
- What should the citizens be told about how long they will be out of their homes?

COMPONENTS OF ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

Visual 5.8

Solving an Ethical Dilemma

Involves:

- Using your own and your organization's ethical values as a guide.
- Sensitivity to the impact of your decisions.
- An ability to evaluate complex, ambiguous, and/or incomplete facts.



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Visual 5.8
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Ethical decision making requires being aware of your own and your organization's ethical values, and using those values as a guide when making decisions.

It also involves being sensitive to the impact of your decisions and being able to evaluate complex, ambiguous, and/or incomplete facts.

COMPONENTS OF ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

Visual 5.9



Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Three components of ethical decision making are:

- Commitment,
- Consciousness, and
- Competency.

COMPONENTS OF ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

Visual 5.10

Ethical Commitment



- Demonstrating a strong desire to act ethically and to do the right thing.
- Especially when ethical action imposes financial, social, or psychological costs.

**FEMA**Visual 5.10
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Ethical commitment (or motivation) is demonstrating a strong desire to act ethically and to do the right thing, especially when ethical action imposes financial, social, or psychological costs.

For example, evacuating community members in a crisis can be complicated by lack of cooperation. In this case, commitment to the whole community may necessitate allowing persons who are unwilling to evacuate to remain.

COMPONENTS OF ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

Visual 5.11

Ethical Consciousness

- Seeing and understanding the ethical implications of our behavior.
- Understanding that other people's perceptions are their reality.



**FEMA**Visual 5.11
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Ethical consciousness (or awareness) involves seeing and understanding the ethical implications of our behavior and applying our ethical values to our daily lives.

Understand that people's perceptions are their reality—and so what we understand to be perfectly legal conduct may be perceived by taxpayers as improper or inappropriate.

For example, a decision to prioritize vaccination of public safety and health care workers when supplies are limited may be seen by the public as unethical (however practical). In this case, action could be taken to enhance public awareness.

COMPONENTS OF ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

Visual 5.12

Ethical Competency

Developing certain ethical decision-making skills, which include:

- Evaluation.
- Creativity.
- Prediction.



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Visual 5.12
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

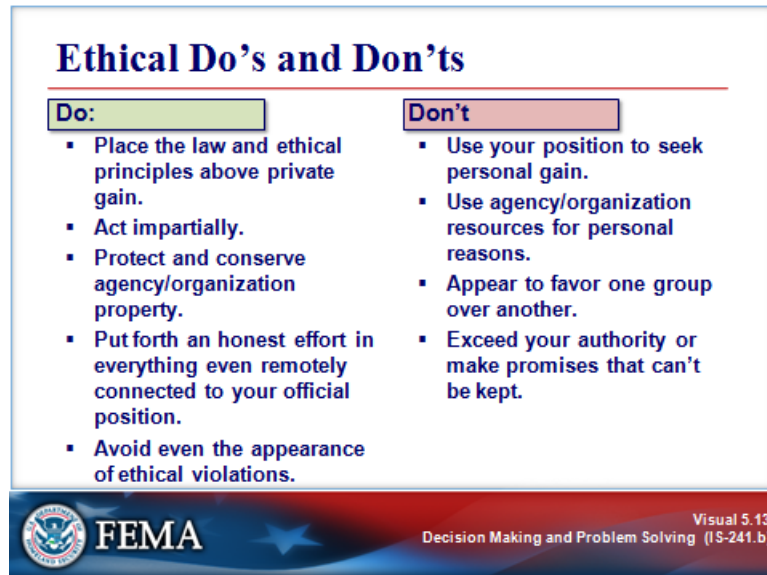
Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Ethical competency (or skill) involves being competent in ethical decision-making skills, which include:

- **Evaluation.** The ability to collect and evaluate relevant facts, and knowing when to stop collecting facts and make prudent decisions based on incomplete and ambiguous facts.
- **Creativity.** The capacity to develop resourceful means of accomplishing goals in ways that avoid or minimize ethical problems.
- **Prediction.** The ability to foresee the potential consequences of conduct and assess the likelihood or risk that persons will be helped or harmed by an act.

COMPONENTS OF ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

Visual 5.13



Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Keep these “do’s” in mind:

- Place the law and ethical principles above private gain.
- Act impartially. Do not show favoritism to one group (e.g., victims or contractors) over another. Two aids in acting impartially include making sure that all affected parties receive full disclosure, and seeking prior authorization before taking action.
- Protect and conserve agency property. This standard applies both to your actions and to the actions that you should take if you observe fraud, waste, or abuse.
- Put forth an honest effort in everything even remotely connected to your official position.
- Avoid even the appearance of ethical violations. Take the extra step of making sure that your actions (even if they are above-board) could not be seen as unethical. Think about how your actions would read on the front page of the newspaper.

The following “don’ts” address specific ethical challenges in a crisis or emergency situation.

- Don't use your position to seek personal gain. Examples of seeking personal gain would include:
 - Soliciting gifts.
 - Making official decisions that benefit you financially.
 - Using inside information gained through your position to benefit you and/or your family.
 - Using agency time or property (e.g., a phone or car) for personal reasons.
 - Using your official position or accepting compensation to endorse a product.
- Don't exceed your authority or make promises.

ACTION REVIEW ACTIVITY

Visual 5.14

Action Review Activity

Instructions:

1. Review the short action descriptions listed in your Student Manual.
2. Identify which decisions appear ethical and which do not.
3. Be prepared to explain your responses.

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Visual 5.14
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Read the statements below and indicate which of the actions appear ethical and which do not.

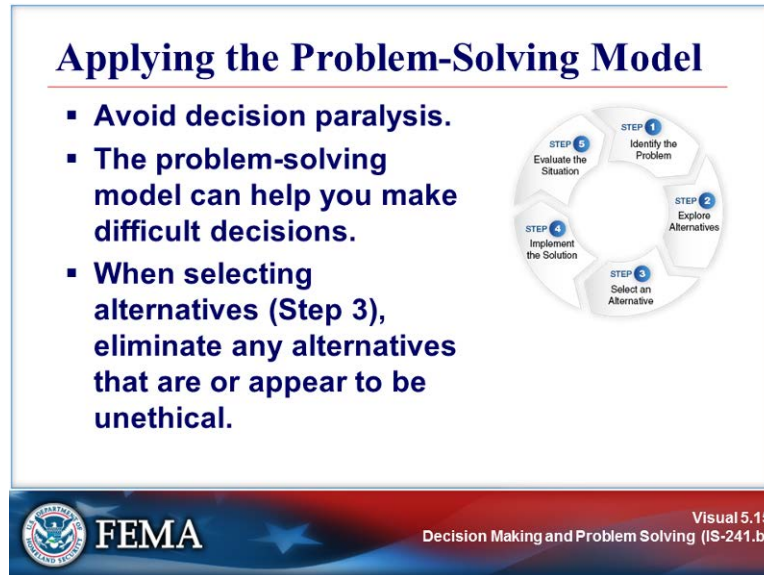
Action Descriptions	Appears Ethical	Appears Unethical
1. Providing more information to one group of evacuees than to another group.		
2. Involving the community in advance concerning decisions about evacuation priorities.		
3. Assigning a decision about a potential contract to another person in the organization when one of your relatives owns one of the bidding companies.		
4. Using inside information gained through your position to benefit yourself or your family.		

Instructor Notes:

1. **Appears Unethical:** This action violates the ethical guideline to act impartially. Emergency management personnel should endeavor to provide the same information to the community as a whole through means that will reach the most people.
2. **Appears Ethical:** This action helps to ensure that decisions are made as impartially as possible. While not all community requests can be implemented fully with existing resources, community members should be involved in the discussion of where to establish limits given limited resources.
3. **Appears Ethical:** This action helps you to avoid the appearance of using your position to seek personal gain.
4. **Appears Unethical:** This action creates an unethical situation of using your position to seek personal gain.

APPLYING THE PROBLEM-SOLVING MODEL

Visual 5.15



Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Ethical dilemmas can be paralyzing—it is dangerous to get tied up in knots and stop making decisions entirely.

Using the problem-solving model can help you make difficult decisions. Think for a moment about the problem-solving model discussed in Lesson 2 and reexamine it in light of what you've just learned about ethics

In using the problem-solving model, when selecting an alternative (Step 3), you should eliminate any alternatives that are unethical—or that give the appearance of being unethical.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Visual 5.16

Considerations

Be sure to consider:

- Who is affected.
- What is at stake.
- Stakeholder needs and values.
- Your values and those of your organization.
- All ethical perspectives that apply.



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Visual 5.16
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

When applying the model to ethical situations, be sure to consider:

- Who is affected.
- What is at stake.
- Stakeholder needs and values.
- Your values and those of your organization.
- All ethical perspectives that apply.

A list of questions that will help you apply the process to ethical situations is included on the following page.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**Visual 5.16 (Continued)****Questions To Ask When Applying the Problem-Solving Model
to Ethical Situations**

Step	Ethical Considerations	Questions To Ask
1. Identify the problem.	Identify the situation, who is affected, and what is at stake.	- What is happening? What could happen if action is not taken? - Who is affected? How? - What do the different parties have at stake? Do some parties have a greater stake (or more to lose)?
2. Explore alternatives.	- Collect all the facts. - Consult experts. - Consider stakeholder needs/values.	- What are the relevant facts needed to make the decision? - What facts are unknown? - What are the experts advising? Why? - What are the needs of all stakeholders? - How do the different stakeholders view the situation?
2. Explore alternatives (continued).	Evaluate alternative actions from various ethical perspectives.	- What are the options for acting? - Have all the relevant persons and groups been consulted in the time available? - How do these alternatives look over the long run as well as the short run? - Think of the wisest person you know. What would he or she do in this situation?
3. Select an alternative.	Make a decision and test it.	How does your decision measure up against values such as honesty, fairness, equality, respecting the dignity of others, respecting people's rights, and recognizing the needs of the most vulnerable community members?
4. Implement the solution. 5. Evaluate the solution.	Act, assess, and learn for the future.	What have we learned from this situation?

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Visual 5.17

Know Your SELF

- Take the time to ensure that your decisions are consistent with your moral standards and values.
- Apply the “SELF” standard.

Your decisions should:

S	... withstand Scrutiny	... by the community, the public, and the media.
E	... Ensure compliance	... with policies and the code of conduct.
L	... show Leadership	... through integrity, accountability, and consistency.
F	... be Fair	... to those we serve, staff, stakeholders, and yourself.





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Visual 5.17
Decision Making and Problem Solving (IS-241.b)

Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

Ethical decision making requires taking the time needed to make sure that your decisions are consistent with your moral standards and values. One way to ensure that you are making ethical decisions consistently is to apply the “SELF” standard. This process can help to uncover small inconsistencies that can undermine personal integrity.

Applying the SELF Standard: Questions To Ask

Decisions Should:	Ask Yourself:
S: Withstand <u>S</u> crutiny	▪ Will I be proud of my decision? ▪ Will my decision reflect honesty, integrity, fairness, and truthfulness?
E: <u>E</u> nsure Compliance	▪ Will my decision or conduct comply with the law? ▪ Will my decision or conduct create value? ▪ Will my decision or conduct reflect and promote the core values of my organization?
L: Show <u>L</u> eadership	▪ Am I being pressured or unduly influenced by others? ▪ Am I being driven by my emotions? ▪ Have I filtered out my ego needs and self-interests? ▪ Are there other alternatives I should consider?
F: Be <u>F</u> air	▪ Will my decision be judged fair now and in the future? ▪ Have I considered the needs and interests of those who might be affected by my decision or conduct? ▪ What will be the consequences of my decision? ▪ Who could be harmed by my decision? ▪ Who will benefit from my decision?

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Visual 5.18



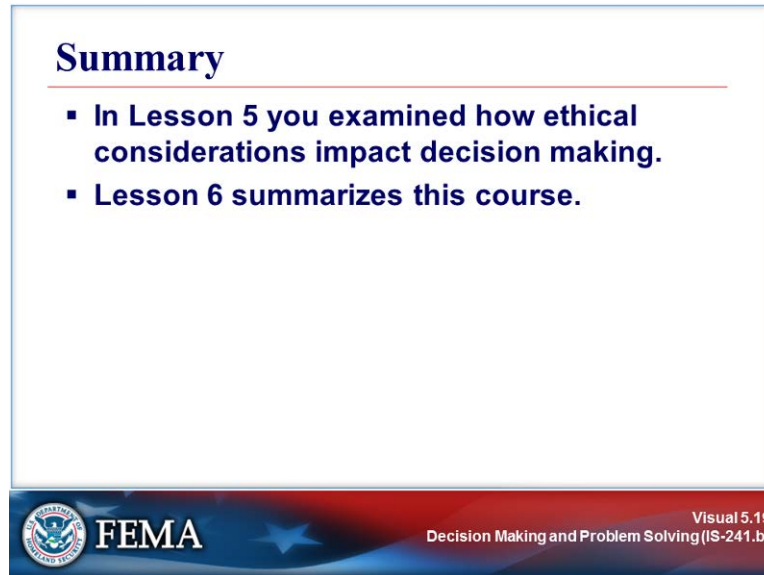
Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

A simple way to apply the scrutiny test to your decision is to ask yourself:

- Could I explain my decision to Mom?
- How well will sleep?
- What's the likely headline?

SUMMARY AND TRANSITION

Visual 5.19



Instructor Notes: Present the following key points.

In Lesson 5, you examined ethical decision making and problem solving. Lesson 6 summarizes this course.

Online Training:

- IS-33.13: FEMA Initial Ethics Orientation 2013
(<http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/courseOverview.aspx?code=is-33.13>)

For More Information:

- Alsott, J. D. The Search for Honor: An Inquiry into the Factors That Influence the Ethics of Federal Acquisition. In J. A. Petrick, W. M. Claunch, & R. F. Scherer (Eds.), *Institutionalizing Organizational Ethics Programs: Contemporary Perspectives* (pp. 182-194). Dayton, OH: Wright State University, 1991.
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- Crawford, S. J., III. Wind and Well-Learned Lessons. *Defense*, Vol. 90, July-August 1990, p. 15.
- Josephson, M. *Making Ethical Decisions*. The Josephson Institute of Ethics, 1992, 1993.
- Karp, H. B. & Abramms, B. Doing the Right Thing. *Training and Development*, August 1992, pp. 37-41.
- Executive Order 12731, Principles of Ethical Conduct for Government Officers and Employees. *Federal Register*, Vol. 55, No. 203, October 19, 1990.
- Government Ethics Center of the Joseph and Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics. *Ethics at the IRS: A Quest for the Highest Standards*. (Internal Revenue Service Management Training Program: Workshop and Resource Materials). Marina Del Rey, CA, 1991.

SUMMARY AND TRANSITION

Visual 5.19 (Continued)

For More Information (Continued)

- Jennings, B. & Arras, J. Ethical Guidance for Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response: Highlighting Ethics and Values in a Vital Public Health Service. Ethics Subcommittee, Advisory Committee to the Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, October 30, 2008.
- Roberts, M. & Renzo, E. G. Ethical Considerations in Community Disaster Planning. In Phillips, S. J. & Knebel, A. (Eds.), Mass Medical Care with Scarce Resources: A Community Planning Guide (Chapter 2). AHRQ Publication No. 07-0001. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2007.