


VALLEJO FIRE DEPARTMENT MANUAL OF OPERATIONS

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	Approved By: Fire Chief Robertson		Date Issued: 10/12/10	Revision Date:	
	Attachments:	Resources/Cross Reference:			
<p>Purpose: To provide professional intervention (immediately) after a major incident to reduce stress related injury to Fire Department personnel and accelerate their return to routine functions after the incident.</p>					

I. Definitions;

- A. The Fire Department uses the Solano/Napa Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team as the group to contact for Critical Incident Stress issues and services.
- A. Critical Incident - Any situation faced by emergency workers that causes them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the scene or later.
- B. Employee Assistance Program (EAP) - A benefit that provides confidential counseling and referral services to employees and their families.
- C. Peer Support Personnel - Peers are drawn from the ranks of emergency personnel. They are specially trained and usually constitute two-thirds of the CISM Team.

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D. Solano/Napa County Critical Incident Stress Management Team – The Solano/Napa CISM Team consists of multi-dimensional stress management services for emergency service personnel of Solano/Napa County. The Team is comprised of a combination of mental health professionals and peer support personnel. The group of peer support personnel is representative of emergency medical services workers in Solano/Napa County.

II Procedure:

A. This procedure applies to any emergency incident which causes personnel to experience strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with their ability to function at the scene or later. Company Officers and Incident Commanders are responsible for identifying those incidents that qualify as "Critical Incidents" and for requesting intervention services.

The following are examples of emergency incidents that may be selected for debriefing:

1. Serious injury or death of a Fire Department member or other emergency personnel.
2. Mass casualty incidents.
3. Suicide of a Fire Department member.
4. Serious injury or death of a civilian during Fire Department operations (i.e. auto accident, etc.)
5. Death of an infant/child, or violence to an infant/child.
6. Loss of life of a patient following extraordinary and prolonged expenditure of physical and emotional energy during rescue efforts by Fire Department personnel.

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7. Incidents that attract extremely unusual or critical news media coverage.
 8. Any incident charged with profound emotion.
 9. Any incident in which the circumstances were so unusual or the sights and sounds so distressing as to produce a high level of immediate or delayed emotional reaction.
 10. Several difficult incidents over a period of time.
 11. Any member requesting intervention.
- B. Reducing personnel exposure to these stressful incidents results in fewer stress related problems. Incident Commanders should reduce this exposure by rotating personnel and by removing initial responding personnel from the immediate scene and reassigning to less stressful operations when possible.
- C. Any personnel directly involved in high stress incidents should be considered a high priority from immediate reassignment/removal from the scene. Relief from duty for these personnel may also be considered.
- D. On-site evaluation and defusing by the CISM Team member should also be considered for emergency personnel on scene, as soon as possible or as members return to quarters and time permits. In such situations, CISM Team members can observe, watch for acute reactions, provide support, encouragement and consultation, and be available to help personnel deal with stress reactions. CISM Team members should be considered a resource available to the Incident Commander for assignments to rehab, medical or other areas, as needed.
- E. The Company Officer is responsible for identifying and recognizing significant incidents that may qualify for defusing or debriefing. A request should be made to the Incident Commander as soon as possible.

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- F. The Duty Assistant Chief may initiate the request for the CISM Team. For serious events notify the Benicia Fire Dispatch at 745-3411 which is the contact point for the CISM Team, or a Team member from Vallejo Fire Department. Benicia Fire Dispatch will activate the Team leader who will contact the Incident Commander. Company Officers, whose crew may have experienced a traumatic event, may also initiate the call out by contacting the Duty Assistant Chief. The specific debriefing services used will depend greatly upon how early the Team is activated and the nature of the incident.
- G. Any Vallejo Fire Department member who feels the need for an individual, confidential debriefing may initiate the process by contacting the Duty Assistant Chief, who will contact the CISM Team for a referral or advise the employee to seek assistance through the Employee Assistance Program.
- H. Critical incident stress debriefing is not a critique of Fire Department operations at the incident. Performance issues **will not** be discussed during the debriefing. The debriefing process provides formats in which personnel can discuss their feelings and reactions and thus, reduce the stress resulting from exposure to critical incidents.
- I. Attendance at the debriefing will be **mandatory** for all personnel who were directly exposed to the traumatic aspects of an incident, however, participation is optional. Exceptions may be granted following assessment by the Incident Commander, Duty Chief or the CISM Team member.
- J. Several types of debriefings may be conducted depending upon the circumstances of a particular incident. They may be conducted in the form of individual or small groups of not more than 25 members, but may vary in size according to the incident. The following types of debriefings, singularly or in combination, are most commonly utilized:

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1. On Scene Support – On scene support is the briefest form of CISM. It can be performed by a CISM Team member, Chaplain or if necessary, a Company/Chief Officer or a Safety Officer. This type of intervention consists of providing on scene support to the employee until other appropriate agencies can be mobilized to provide services.
2. Demobilization – Reserved for large scale incidents (i.e. disasters) and takes the place of defusing. Immediately after personnel disengage from an incident, they are sent to a meeting area where a CISM Team member(s) will be present. Personnel will be provided with a twenty-minute presentation on the typical effects of critical incident stress and the signs and symptoms that may occur. Additionally, personnel are given many practical suggestions for stress management, along with an opportunity to ask questions or make comments.

All personnel being demobilized are given the opportunity to get something to eat and relax before returning to duty or going home.

3. Initial Defusing – A short, unstructured discussion of the events of an incident. Defusing significantly reduces acute stress. A defusing is usually anywhere from one to three hours following an incident, and generally lasts from thirty to sixty minutes. A well run defusing usually eliminates the need for a formal debriefing. The defusing can be facilitated by a CISM Team member. A priority for the defusing is to make sure this is done prior to the members going off duty. The goal is to discuss the incident and remind Fire Department personnel to be prepared for signs of post incident stress.

It should be recognized by the Duty Assistant Chief of the possibility that personnel may have to be relieved from duty following a critical incident. All efforts should be made to get relief for the affected personnel. Additionally, the affected individual(s) should not be allowed to leave until it is determined that they are properly defused. If it is questionable as to whether the individual(s) are suitable to leave after the defusing, the CISM Team or EAP should be contacted.

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4. Formal Debriefing - An educational and psychological support group discussion facilitated by a CISM Team. It is usually done anywhere from twenty-four to seventy-two hours following an incident. It follows a carefully designed structure that progresses through the seven phases and provides important stress reduction information. While participants are not required to speak, they are encouraged to discuss various aspects of the incident that distressed them. The whole process usually takes approximately two to three hours. The material discussed in the debriefing is strictly **CONFIDENTIAL**.
 5. Counseling - A service that provides individual counseling with a qualified mental health professional. EAP usually provides this service, however, it can be provided by another mental health professional. The session(s) is strictly confidential. This is usually a follow up to the above-mentioned interventions.
- K. Debriefings may be conducted anywhere that provides ample space, privacy and freedom from distractions.
- L. The CISM Team will consist of mental health professionals trained in stress related counseling, as well as emergency services personnel. The Vallejo Fire Department Team member's role in the defusing/debriefing process will be to assist and support the professional counselors, as necessary. Required follow-up care may be administered by the CISM Team or referred to EAP. All follow up care outside of EAP will be approved by Risk Management through the Fire Chief, prior to treatment.

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M. Circumstances of a critical incident may result in a recommendation by the CISM Team that individuals or companies be taken out of services. Such decisions may include returning personnel to their station(s) in an out of services status and allowing member(s) to determine for themselves when they are mentally and physically prepared to return to service. In other circumstances, the crew member(s) may decide that they cannot return to duty, or the CISM counselor may recommend relief from duty for the balance of the shift. If this is the case, the Duty Assistant Chief will be responsible for filing the proper documents for Workers' Compensation and make appropriate arrangements.

1. Under no circumstances is such action to be construed as critical or negative. Personnel taken out of service are to be viewed as deserving of the same consideration as an "injured" employee.

N. Activating the Critical Incident Stress Management Team

1. Activation of the CISM process may be initiated by the following positions:
 - a. Chief Officer
 - b. Incident Commander
 - c. Company Officer
2. The Vallejo Fire Department Team member should be contacted any time there is a need for on scene defusing or activation of the CISM Team.
3. The CISM Team can be activated through the twenty-four hour hotline at 745-3411. Be prepared to provide the following information:
 - a. The date of the incident
 - b. Type of incident

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- c. Number of emergency personnel affected by the incident
- d. Types of services requested (defusing/debriefing)
- e. Scheduling preferences for intervention