



# PROCEDURE MANUAL

**Code: 2-8-13**

## Safety Program

### **Critical Incident Stress Management**

Original Date: 2003 Revised Date: February 10, 2011

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#### **13.01 PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure is to ensure that all Sonoma County Fire and Emergency Services paid and volunteer staff are provided a procedure to assist them when they have responded to an incident that may cause long- or short-term emotional psychological trauma.

The Department will function as the lead agency for the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) team. The CISM team will provide education to fire department employees and partners on stress recognition and the policies, procedures, and services for obtaining help when needed. The Department will offer and provide for psychological debriefing subsequent to all major disasters. Similar debriefings will be provided on smaller scale traumatic incidents as well. The Department recognizes that each member has a responsibility to request help as needed on an individual basis.

#### **13.02 SCOPE**

All Sonoma County Fire and Emergency Services Department (County Fire) paid and volunteer staff

#### **13.03 POLICY**

County Fire is committed to caring for the emotional well being of department members, specifically as it relates to large-scale or mass casualty incidents, fire fatalities, or other particularly stressful incidents and reduce the potential for traumatic stress disorders.

#### **13.04 PROCEDURES**

- a. As soon as feasible during or after a critical incident, the County Fire Duty Officer or Volunteer representative shall contact the county Fire Safety Officer and request a Post Incident Stress Defusing. The request shall include the following information:

- Name and title of officer in charge
- Information that led to the call for the debriefing
- Date & time of incident
- Duration of incident
- Number of victims/patients
- Type of incident
- Personnel on scene

- b. As soon as feasible during the incident the Duty Officer or Incident Commander will contact REDCOM and request a member of the Law Enforcement Chaplaincy Program respond to the scene and or contact the Duty Officer.
- c. Whenever possible, the defusing shall take place immediately following the incident or within 48 hours of the incident.
- d. Only those involved in the incident and members of the County Fire Critical Incident Stress Management team members shall attend the defusing.
- e. A critical incident debriefing may be scheduled for several days after the incident to revisit and assist responders with traumatic stress related issues.
- f. If a responder (s) needs additional debriefing and or therapeutic treatment, the County Fire Safety Officer will work with Risk Management to facilitate the appropriate referrals to a specialist.

### **13.05 DEFINITIONS**

“Critical Incident” is a significant event that, due to its own nature or the circumstances in which it occurs, carries the high potential for psychological distress in healthy, normal people, possibly causing emotional reactions that may interfere with job performance and/or later disability. The CISM team will provide an organized approach to management of stress responses for firefighters and/or police officers having been exposed to, or showing signs of, traumatic stress experienced in the line of duty. A critical incident can be any situation that causes employees to experience strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with their ability to function at the scene or later.

The following are examples of incidents that could result in CISM response:

- Major disaster/mass casualties
- Serious injury, death, or suicide of a firefighter or police officer
- Serious injury or death of a civilian resulting from emergency service Operations
- Death of a child, or other incident involving profound emotional responses
- Any incident which attracts unusually heavy attention of the news media
- Loss of life following an unusual, or extremely prolonged expenditure of emotional and physical energy by the emergency services personnel
- Any unusual incident which produces a high level or immediate or delayed emotional response
- Cumulative trauma syndromes from multiple incidents

### **13.06 Elements of CISM**

- a. Initial ventilation of feelings by the emergency services worker, and an assessment by a facilitator of the intensity of the stress response.
- b. A detailed discussion of the signs and symptoms of the stress response, and provides for support and reassurance.
- c. The closure stage, where information is provided and, if necessary, a plan of further action or referral may be made.

### **13.07 Types of CISM Debriefings**

There are four types of CISM debriefings:

- a. On the scene debriefing – The CISM team members will respond to the scene, and will function as observers and advisors to watch for the development of acute reactions. The team members will offer encouragement and support, check on the well-being of personnel, and allow for ventilation of feelings and reactions on individual bases, when appropriate.
- b. An initial defusing – May take place shortly (several hours) after the incident and would be facilitated, in most cases, by the Chaplain or other CISM team members. This is an informal process encouraging an open, free expression of feelings without a critique of the incident or the personnel's response.
- c. The formal CISM debriefing.
  - This debriefing will be led by a qualified mental health professional from the CISM team, and will take place approximately 24 to 48 hours after the conclusion of the incident.
  - The facilitator will be an individual with a background in group interactions and dynamics, and with a working knowledge of stress response syndromes and of the operational procedures of the emergency services group.
  - A follow-up debriefing, performed several weeks or months after a critical incident, may be held, if necessary. If it is held, its main purpose is to resolve any issues or problems that were not initially resolved. The follow-up debriefing may be performed with the entire group, or a portion thereof.

### **13.08 Treatment**

Treatment for alleviation of stress-related symptoms will be provided as needed, through the employees' health plan or other assistance program offered by the County

### **13.07 REFERENCES**

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. *Health and Safety Handbook*. Section 1861, Critical Incident Stress, July 1993.

Four Communities Fire Department, Florida. *Standard Operating Procedures*. Section 10, April 2006.

