

Section 1 - ADMINISTRATIVE

110.03 Critical Incident Stress Management

PURPOSE:

- To establish guidelines for conducting critical incident stress management.

GENERAL STATEMENTS:

- Emergency response personnel face more than physical risks. The psychological consequences of exposure to trauma in the fire service can result in high levels of burnout, long-term emotional difficulties and other life-disrupting problems.
- A critical incident is defined as: any incident that evokes extraordinary emotion on the part of emergency workers and overwhelms their ability to cope, either at the scene or later.
- Critical Incident Stress Management (C.I.S.M.) is a psychological and an emotional process designed to reduce and control the impact of critical incidents. It is designed to accelerate *normal* recovery processes in *normal* people who are experiencing *normal* reactions to *abnormal* circumstances.
- CISM does not equate to a critique of emergency operations at the scene. Performance issues will not be discussed at the debriefing. The debriefing process provides a format in which personnel can discuss their feelings and reactions and thus reduce the stress resulting from exposure to critical incidents. All debriefings will be strictly confidential.
- Examples of incidents that may call for a CISM include but are not limited to:
  - Serious injury or death to a fellow emergency worker
  - Multiple casualty incidents
  - Suicide of a crewmember
  - Death of a child
  - Death or serious injury of a civilian resulting from emergency service operations
  - Prolonged or extraordinary rescue or recovery operations with expenditures of intense physical or emotional energy.
  - Intensive media coverage and scrutiny.

PROCEDURE:

- Any member recognizing stress or situations for potential stress in themselves or coworkers may contact their Lieutenant, Battalion Chief, Deputy Fire Chief, or Fire Chief and request assistance. These calls will be kept confidential.
- Following any Critical Incident either the CISM Team Leader or other assigned member will conduct a defusing session and disperse informational materials relating to Critical Incident Stress.
- When indicated, the CISM Team Leader will then make arrangements for a formal debriefing through local protocols. (The debriefing will occur within 72 hours of the incident) when possible.
- All members present at the incident will be required to attend the debriefing to act as peer support for other members.
- The debriefing will be limited to those personnel involved in the actual incident (including dispatchers, police officers, ambulance personnel, and hospital personnel), the peer counselors, and a mental health professional. No media will be allowed.
- All items relating to the activities of the debriefing will be kept strictly confidential.
- Further referral for assistance may be initiated as required.

Category: Rules and Regulations