

Tempe Fire Department Policies and Procedures
Critical Incident Stress Intervention
112.04B
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INTRODUCTION

Case studies by medical groups of major incidents where numerous injuries or fatalities occurred, have revealed that significant numbers of rescue personnel experienced some form of stress-related symptoms following the incident. Many of these symptoms were brief, and most personnel had no long-term detrimental effects. These studies, however, have also revealed that a small percentage of personnel do experience continuing, long-term detrimental effects resulting from exposure to such incidents. Some of these effects have been delayed, surfacing later after a period of no apparent symptoms. Without professional intervention, these personnel have experienced declining work performance and deterioration of family relationships as well as increased health problems. Personnel that have been repeatedly exposed to serious incidents or personally significant incidents, over a period of time may also exhibit stress-related problems, called cumulative stress. The objective of this procedure is to provide professional intervention to minimize stress-related injury to Fire Department personnel.

THE CRITICAL INCIDENT

Fire department response to incidents that cause personnel unusually strong emotional involvement will qualify for some form of critical incident stress intervention (i.e., defusing, debriefing, or one-on-one contact). The following are examples of incidents that require intervention:

- Any incident that effects any one crew member profoundly, where he/she may need confidential support.
- Serious injury or death of a fire department member or other emergency personnel (including suicide).
- Mass casualty incidents.
- Death of a child, or violence to a child.
- Serious injury or death of a civilian resulting from fire department operations (i.e., auto accident, etc.).
- Loss of life of a patient following extraordinary and prolonged expenditure of physical and emotional energy during rescue efforts by fire department personnel.
- Hindered, failed, or complicated situations that affected goals (possibly cause of death, or injury).
- Drownings or near-drownings involving a child.
- Incidents that attract extremely unusual or critical news media coverage.
- Any incident that is charged with profound emotion.
- 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.

ON-SITE MANAGEMENT

Minimizing exposure to these stressful incidents result in fewer stress-related problems. Command should reduce this exposure by rotating personnel and by removing initial personnel from the scene as soon as possible.

Any personnel directly involved in high-stress incidents (particularly previously listed examples) should be considered as high priority for immediate removal from the scene. Relief from duty for these personnel may also be a consideration.

On-site evaluation and contact by a critical incident stress team (CIST) member should also be considered for some critical incidents when time and circumstances permit. In such situations, a critical incident stress team member can observe, watch for acute reactions, provide support, encouragement, consultation, and be available to help resting personnel deal with stress reactions. Team members should be considered a resource available to Command for assignment to Rehab, or other sectors as needed.

ACTIVATION OF THE CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS PROCESS

Company officers, the incident commander, and the critical incident stress team members bear the responsibilities for recognizing significant incidents that require intervention. When an incident is identified as a "critical incident," a request for a defusing or debriefing should be made to your captain, deputy chief, or a critical incident stress team member as soon as possible.

Any incident commander, company officer, or crew member who may have experienced a traumatic event may initiate the CIS process by contacting a CIST member, his or her captain, or the deputy chief. All other department personnel working in other areas besides suppression would contact a CIST member or their immediate supervisors. The CIST member in conjunction with the company officer and/or deputy chief will evaluate the incident and determine what level of intervention is necessary (i.e., defusing or debriefing). The form of intervention utilized will depend greatly upon how early the team is activated and the nature of the incident. Strict confidentiality is to be maintained during the entire process.

One member of the CIS team will have a digital pager at all times. To activate the CIS team, deputy chiefs and captains may call the CIST pager number. The CIST member with the pager will contact the number given within 15 minutes. The CIST member will get the information about the incident and begin the process of intervention decided upon by the deputy chief or captain and CIST member. The CIST member will be responsible for contacting other CIST members and Tempe Social Services when necessary. The CIST member will also make arrangements for the meeting place. This method should make team notification much easier and maintain confidentiality. If there has been no response within 15 minutes, the team can be activated by one of the following methods:

- Contact the Alarm Room and advise them to notify a Tempe CIST member and have him call the deputy chief or captain at the number given.
- Contact an on-duty CIST member and advise him of the situation and that the CIST member did not respond when paged.

Any member who feels the need for a personal, confidential one-on-one or defusing may initiate the process by contacting a CIS team member or the contracted professional counseling staff (Contact, Inc.) or Tempe Social Services directly.

The CIS team will be responsible for coordinating the critical incident process. Follow-up care and other support functions may be coordinated by Tempe Social Services, which is CIST medical control.

AFTER ACTIVATION OF THE CIS TEAM

CIST contacts are left to the discretion of the CIS team member to either contact personnel involved by telephone or in situations where the critical incident warrants, make contact in person to determine what form of intervention is necessary.

TYPES OF INTERVENTION

The type of intervention by the CIS team will be determined by confidential discussion of the critical incident with the company officer, crew members, and/or deputy chief. Contact with a CIST team member does not automatically mandate a debriefing, unless it meets required criteria.

The types of intervention are as follows:

One-On-One - Done by either a Fire Department CIS team member or professional counselor. One-on-ones may be done anytime.

Defusing - Conducted normally by two Fire Department CIS team members, no professional counselor involved, within close proximity, preferably before going off-shift, 30-45 minutes, informal, confidential.

Debriefing - Critical incident 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 thoughts and reactions and thus, reduce the stress resulting from exposure to critical incidents. All debriefings will be strictly confidential. Debriefings are conducted by professional counselors and fire department CIS team members and should be done within 72 hours of the incident but after 24 hours if possible. Debriefings are formal lasting one-to-two hours and may be preceded by a defusing a short time after the incident.

Follow-up Debriefings - Are rare and are usually conducted weeks or months after the incident where there is concern of delayed or prolonged stress symptoms. This type of debriefing may be done informally.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance of defusings or debriefings is mandatory of all personnel who were directly exposed to the traumatic aspects of an incident selected for intervention. Exceptions may be granted following assessment by the CIS team member involved.

LOCATION

Defusings and debriefings may be conducted anywhere that provides ample space, privacy, and freedom from distractions. Any meeting facilities, centrally-located to the involved companies, are worthy of consideration. A fire station is not an option. Examples of meeting places are Fire Training Center, Community Room - Fire Administration, Pyle Center, Library, Tempe St. Luke's. Selection of the site will be determined by the CIS team member.

STATUS OF CREWS DURING INTERVENTION

During one-on-one, defusings, and debriefings all crews involved will be out of service (unavailable) and all radios, pagers or other distractions will be secured. Confidentiality will be strictly maintained.

THE CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS TEAM

The CIS team will consist of professionals in stress-related counseling as well as Fire Department personnel. The Fire Department CIS team members' role in the CIS process will be to assist and support the professional counselors as necessary during a debriefing process. During a defusing the Fire Department CIS team members will conduct the defusing without a professional counselor present. One-on-one meetings may be conducted by either a professional counselor or Fire Department CIS team member, depending on what the incident calls for and/or what the involved personnel request.

RELIEVING PERSONNEL FROM DUTY

Circumstances of a critical incident may result in a recommendation by the CIS team that individuals or companies be taken out of service. Such decisions may include returning personnel to their station(s) in an out-of-service status and allowing crew(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 professional counselor may recommend relief from duty for the balance of the shift. If this is the case, the Emergency Services assistant chief, the duty deputy chief, or supervisor will be responsible for making appropriate arrangements. Under no circumstances is a recommendation for relief from duty to be construed as critical or negative.