

Critical Incident Stress Management Policy

Adopted date: Oct 26, 2022	Amended date:	Next Review: 2026
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OBJECTIVE

To foster and maintain the well-being and productivity of employees and volunteers by providing clear policies and procedures that are humane, sensitive and responsive to employees who have or may experience a traumatic event in the workplace or during the performance of their duties.

DEFINITIONS

“CISM” means Critical Incident Stress Management

“District” means Van Anda Improvement District

SCOPE

All First Responders associated with Van Anda Improvement District

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The District recognizes that being a First Responder is inherently stressful and that response personnel are likely to be involved in critical incidents because of the nature of their work. The goals of the critical incident stress management program are to offer support to employees that:

- Minimizes the emotional impact of critical incidents;
- Increases resistance and resilience to this type of stress;
- Helps mitigate the impact of a critical incident on workers and employees at or near the time of such incidents; and
- Provides for follow-up and referral that provides treatment of any chronic effects that may arise from a critical incident.

A critical incident is a traumatic event, outside the usual range of human experience and an individual’s control, which could happen at work or in the community, which can cause a strong emotional reaction with the potential to affect one’s ability to cope with the after effect. Critical incidents would include:

- Death or serious injury of a colleague in the line of duty;
- Incidents involving the death or serious injury of members of the public, particularly children;
- Incidents where responders know the victims involved;
- Being the victim of physical violence;

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- Witnessing violence at an incident or workplace;
- Having to work in an area where a critical incident is occurring, even though not directly exposed to this situation;
- Suicide of a colleague;
- Any incident where there is intensive or negative media coverage; and
- Any other incident deemed critical by the Fire Chief in joint consultation with a Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) mental health professional.

The CISM program is in place primarily to respond to the needs of employees directly involved in critical incidents. These employees will be expected to receive CISM service following a critical incident. Following a critical incident, the formal decision to provide additional CISM services will be made by the Fire Chief based on a needs assessment provided by a CISM mental health professional or a trained CISM peer-support person. The Fire Chief, in the role of crisis manager shall ensure that WorkSafeBC is contacted to provide critical incident intervention under their Critical Incident Response (CIR) Program. The Fire Chief shall:

- Ensure that all employees are informed about CISM;
- Encourage employees to recognize their own need for assistance and obtain CISM services and/or contact a trained CISM peer-support colleague to access CISM services;
- Provide all necessary support to employees using CISM services; and
- Provide CISM peer-support colleagues with all necessary training to fulfill their obligations and responsibilities related to CISM.

CISM services offered are mostly peer-managed and peer-driven process, which use a CISM mental health professional for guidance when needed. Types of interventions that can be held include: preventive training; on-scene support; defusing session; debriefing session; critiquing session; and corporate review. The program is completely voluntary and the services are available without charge to employees. Any decision on the part of an employee to use the CISM will not impact on employment or promotional opportunities. An employee may end their association with the CISM at any time.

IMPARTIALITY OF INTERVENERS

A CISM peer-support worker should not provide CISM service to close relatives, friends or people they supervise at the workplace.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

Information in records or gathered in CISM sessions shall be considered confidential and private. Personal information relating to individual case files of a CISM client is released only with the written consent of the client or where the law requires or permits the release of that information.

ELIGIBILITY

All permanent, part-time, seasonal, casual, paid-on-call, volunteers working for the District and contract employees of the District will be eligible upon the date of hire. Former employees will be covered for six calendar months beyond the date of termination of employment. At the sole discretion of the Fire Chief and on the recommendation of a CISM mental health professional, benefits for a former employee will be extended beyond six calendar months in situations where mental health issues are a reaction to one

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or more traumatic events that clearly and objectively arose out of and in the course of employment with the Fire Service.

SERVICES TO FAMILIES

Family members do not normally directly experience the critical incident; however, they do experience how the incident affects their family members. At the sole discretion of the Fire Chief and on the recommendation of a CISM mental health professional, counselling services will be made available for family members in situations where mental health issues of an employee are impacting the family and these issues are a reaction to one or more traumatic events that arose out of and in the course of employment with the Fire Service.

PROGRAM LIMITATIONS

CISM does not involve therapy or counselling. If required, counselling and follow-up intervention will be provided through WorkSafeBC's Critical Incident Response (CIR) Program, and/or WorkSafeBC if a claim for compensation is approved. An employee may experience critical incidents outside VAID First Responder work. Counselling services in these incidences would be accessed through other means. The CISM program is intended to only deal with critical incidents that arise out of and in the course of service as a VAID First Responder. Additional professional counselling services may be available through community resources.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Worksafe BC