

	EVANSVILLE FIRE DEPARTMENT		
	SOG		
	SOG 4000.001	CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS INTERVENTION	
	Effective: December 8, 2011	Reviewed:	Revised:

I. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this procedure is to provide professional intervention to minimize stress-related psychological or emotional injury to Fire Department personnel who have responded to a critical incident.

II. 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., one-on-one contact, defusing, or debriefing). The following are examples of incidents that require intervention:

- Any incident that affects 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.
- Serious injury to a child, 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).
- Drowning or near-drowning 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.

III. ON-SITE MANAGEMENT

Minimizing exposure to these stressful incidents results in fewer stress-related problems. Command should reduce this exposure by rotating personnel and 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

IV. ACTIVATION OF THE CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS PROCESS

Company Officers, Chief Officers, and the Incident Commander 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 as soon as possible.

Any member of the department who has experienced a traumatic event may initiate the CIS process by contacting their immediate supervisor or the department Chaplain. The request will be passed through the Chain of Command, so the Chief, Assistant Chief, or Operations Chief, in conjunction with the department Chaplain, can 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 request is made and the nature of the incident. **Strict confidentiality** is to be maintained during the entire process.

Any member who feels the need for a personal, confidential, one-on-one or defusing may initiate the process by contacting the department's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider or department Chaplain.

The Chief or Assistant Chief, along with the Operations Chief and department Chaplain will be responsible for coordinating the critical incident process. Follow-up care and other support functions may be coordinated by EAP counselors and the department Chaplain.

V. AFTER NOTIFICATION OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT – TYPES OF INTERVENTION

The type of intervention by the department Chaplain or EAP Counselor will be determined by a confidential discussion of the critical incident with personnel most involved or affected by the incident. Contact with the department Chaplain or EAP Counselor does not automatically mandate a debriefing, unless it meets required criteria. The types of intervention are as follows:

One-On-One - Done by the department Chaplain or EAP Counselor. One-on ones may be done anytime.

Defusing- Conducted normally by department Chaplain and Chief Officer, no professional counselor involved. This intervention is completed within close proximity of the incident, 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 to reduce the stress resulting from exposure to critical incidents. All debriefings will be strictly confidential. Debriefings are conducted by EAP professional Counselors and the department Chaplain and should be done within 72 hours of the incident, preferably within 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.

VI. ATTENDANCE

Attendance for defusing or debriefing is mandatory for all personnel who were directly exposed to the traumatic aspects of an incident selected for intervention. Exceptions may be granted following assessment by the department Chaplain or EAP professional Counselor.

VII. LOCATION

Defusing and debriefing 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, Fire Administration, or EAP facility. Selection of the site will be determined by the Chief or Assistant Chief.

VIII. STATUS OF CREWS DURING INTERVENTION

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

IX. THE CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS TEAM

The CIS team will consist of the department Chaplain and EAP professional Counselors. During a defusing the department Chaplain will conduct the defusing without a professional counselor present. One-on-one meetings may be conducted by either a professional counselor or department Chaplain, depending on what the incident calls for and/or what the involved personnel request.

X. RELIEVING PERSONNEL FROM DUTY

Circumstances of a critical incident may result in a recommendation by the Chief, Assistant Chief, Chief of Operations, or District Chief 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 or department Chaplain may recommend relief from duty for the balance of the shift. If this is the case, the Chief of Operations or District Chief will be responsible for making appropriate arrangements. Under no circumstances is a recommendation for relief from duty to be construed as critical or negative