



GERMANTOWN FIRE DEPARTMENT - STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

SUBJECT: CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT	S.O.P. 1.02
CATEGORY: PERSONNEL	PAGE: 1 OF 3
APPROVED BY: Chief, Germantown Fire Department	DATE: July 1, 2009

PURPOSE: To provide professional intervention after significant incidents in order to minimize stress-related problems to Fire Department personnel.

I. THE CRITICAL INCIDENT

Any incident faced by Fire Department personnel that causes them to experience a distressing emotional reaction may qualify for a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD). Although different incidents may create different reactions, the following are some examples of incidents that may be appropriate for debriefing:

- A. The serious injury or death of a department employee or other emergency personnel working at an incident or en route;
- B. Mass casualties;
- C. Suicide or unexpected death of a crewmember;
- D. Serious injury or death of a civilian resulting from department operations, e.g., collision of emergency units responding to a call;
- E. Death of and/or violence to a child;
- F. Loss of life following extraordinary and prolonged expenditures of physical and emotional energy during rescue efforts by department personnel;
- G. Incidents that attract extremely unusual or extensive media coverage;
- H. Incidents in which circumstances are unusually bizarre and/or trigger profound emotional reactions.

II. CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS DEBRIEFING TEAM

The Tennessee Critical Incident Stress Management Association, Inc. provides CISD to the Germantown Fire Department as needed. This service is provided at no charge. The Memphis Area CISD Team may be requested 24-hours a day through Memphis MedCom at (901) 545-8181.

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CISD is most effective when held within a few days of the occurrence of the event. A debriefing usually lasts from one to three hours. Participants should, preferably, be off-duty and not reporting on-duty immediately after the CISD meeting. Participants should plan to stay for the entire meeting and are asked not to leave the room during the debriefing.

III. ON-SITE MANAGEMENT

Minimizing prolonged exposure of personnel to these critical incidents decreases the likelihood of stress-related problems developing. Command officers can reduce this exposure by rotating personnel and/or by removing initial and unnecessary personnel from the scene as soon as possible.

For critical incidents of extreme magnitude, on-site consultation by members of the CISD team is available by contacting Communications.

Debriefing team members will serve as advisers to the Incident Commander. The debriefer will be alert for acute stress reactions; provide support, encouragement, and consultation; and be available to assist resting personnel in dealing with stress reactions.

IV. ACTIVATION OF THE DEBRIEFING PROCESS

Supervisors or company officers shall be aware of the possible need for a debriefing following a significant incident. Any department employee may request a debriefing through his/her supervisor or company officer. Supervisors or company officers shall forward requests to the battalion chief as soon as possible after the incident. The battalion chief or his/her designee shall then contact the Tennessee Critical Incident Stress Management Association, via MedCom, to schedule a CISD. The CISD Team Leader is responsible for coordinating the debriefing process. Under special circumstances, debriefings may include non-department personnel, such as other city employees involved in the incident. The Battalion Chief shall notify the Assistant Chief in the event of a debriefing.

If any personnel have questions about the need for a debriefing, a debriefing team member can be contacted for consultation. Any department employee who feels that an individual, confidential debriefing would be valuable may notify his/her supervisor or contact the CISD team directly. If confidential, personal counseling is desired, any individual may also arrange for this with the Fire Department Chaplain or the City Personnel Department.

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V. DEBRIEFING

A debriefing is a confidential, educational process designed to accelerate the normal recovery process in individuals who have been exposed to highly abnormal events. The debriefing process provides an opportunity for personnel to discuss their feelings and reactions in order to reduce the stress resulting from exposure to critical incidents. During the debriefing, participants are encouraged, although not required, to ventilate their actions, reactions, thoughts and feelings related to their roles in the event. A debriefing is **not** a critique of department operations at the incident, nor will performance be discussed. Management personnel may be present if involved in the event or their presence is accepted by all of the participants.

Debriefings are preferably conducted in small groups of not more than 25 people; however, they may include any number of personnel or also occur on an individual basis. All debriefings shall be strictly confidential. The debriefing team usually includes mental health professionals and two or more peer debriefers.

The type of debriefing conducted depends upon the circumstances of a particular incident. The following is a listing of the debriefings most commonly utilized, singularly or in combination:

- A. On-Scene Debriefing: See On-Site Management, Section III.
- B. Initial Defusing: This debriefing, which is conducted shortly after the incident, is a spontaneous, non-evaluative discussion often with no designated leader. It is primarily informational, often including an update and status report on the incident and related injuries. This debriefing may be done with the assistance of a CISD Team or may involve department personnel involved with the incident.
- C. Formal Debriefing: This debriefing is conducted within 72 hours of a critical incident. It is a confidential, non-evaluative discussion about involvement in the incident, thoughts and feelings, and stress reactions. A debriefing usually lasts from one to three hours. Participants should plan to stay for the entire meeting and are asked not to leave the room during the debriefing. All units and personnel in attendance are off-duty or out-of-service during this debriefing and, preferably, should not be returning to duty during that day.
- D. Follow-up Debriefing: This informal debriefing, which occurs weeks or months after the incident, is concerned with delayed or prolonged stress reactions.
- E. Individual Consultation: These one-to-one counseling sessions are available at any time, as needed, for any concerns related to critical incidents.