REGIONAL STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

# Critical Incident Stress Management

#: 107.00 REV: 11/2015

**SCOPE:**

To provide for the emotional well being of emergency responders, specifically as it relates to large-scale or mass casualty incidents, fire fatalities, or other particularly stressful incidents.

**PURPOSE:**

Sierra Vista Fire & Medical Services will function as the lead agency for Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) within the greater Sierra Vista Area. The Regional CISM team will offer and provide for psychological debriefing subsequent to the incident types mentioned above. Additionally, area responders have the responsibility to request help as needed on an individual basis in accordance with the resources available within their respective agencies.

**SAFETY:**

The potential exists for our members to suffer short- and long-term psychological and physiological harmful effects of critical incident stress resulting from the performance of their duties. This procedure will help keep our personnel healthy as it relates to stress from traumatic events.

**PROCEDURE:**

The Regional CISM Team will provide an organized approach to management of stress responses for firefighters, EMS personnel, and/or police officers having been exposed to, or showing signs of, traumatic stress experienced in the line of duty. A critical incident can be any situation that causes employees to experience strong emotional

reactions and/or that have the potential to interfere with their ability to function at the scene or later. The following are examples of incidents that could result in a CISM response:

- Major disaster/mass casualties
- Serious injury, death, or suicide of a firefighter or police officer
- Serious injury or death of a civilian resulting from emergency service operations
- Death of a child, or other incident involving profound emotional responses
- Any incident which attracts unusually heavy attention of the news media
- Loss of life following an unusual, or extremely prolonged expenditure of emotional and physical energy by the emergency services personnel
- Any unusual incident which produces a high level or immediate or delayed emotional response
- Cumulative trauma syndromes from multiple incidents

**Elements of CISM**

There are three basic elements of CISM. The first involves an initial ventilation of feelings by the emergency services worker, and an assessment by a facilitator of the intensity of the stress response. Part two involves a more detailed discussion of the signs and symptoms of the stress response, and provides for support and reassurance. The third stage is the closure stage, where information is provided and, if necessary, a plan of further action or referral may be made.

**Types of CISM Debriefings**

There are basically four types of CISM debriefings:

1. On the scene debriefing – The CISM team members will respond to the scene, and will function as observers and advisors to watch for the development of acute reactions. The team members will offer encouragement and support, check on the well-being of personnel, and allow for defusing of feelings and reactions on an individual basis, when appropriate.
2. An initial defusing – May take place shortly (several hours) after the incident and will be facilitated by Peer Support Team (or CISM Team) members. This is an informal process encouraging an open, free expression of feelings without a critique of the incident. Defusing can be performed by two or more trained Peer

Support Team members and may not necessitate the employment of the Regional CISM Team, depending on the availability of Peer Support Team members within that agency.

3. The formal CISM debriefing – This debriefing **will be facilitated/led by a qualified mental health professional** from the CISM team, and will take place approximately 24 to 48 hours after the conclusion of the incident. The facilitator will be an individual with a background in group interactions and dynamics, and with a working knowledge of stress response syndromes and of the operational procedures of the emergency services group.
4. A follow-up debriefing, performed several weeks or months after a critical incident, may be held, if necessary. If it is held, its main purpose is to resolve any issues or problems that were not initially resolved. The follow-up debriefing may be performed with the entire group, or a portion thereof. This debriefing **will be facilitated/led by a qualified mental health professional** from the CISM team as well.

**Requesting CISM Assistance**

Within the respective agency, CISM support should be requested by contacting that agency's Peer Support Representative, who will in turn contact the Regional CISM Team Leader to determine what level of debriefing is appropriate and feasible. Debriefing will then be scheduled by the Regional CISM Team Leader.

**Additional Individual Support**

Additional individual (professional) support for stress-related symptoms should be provided as needed, through the employees' health plan or other assistance program offered by the respective agency.

**Education and Training**

As a minimum training requirement, members of the Regional CISM Team shall attend and successfully complete the ICISF Individual and Group Crisis Intervention courses.

It should be emphasized that CISM team members are not to be thought of as "psychologists." However, each CISM team member will be trained to recognize certain signs and symptoms associated with stress, as well as to know where to refer responders for the appropriate additional support.