



SERVICE STANDARD 7.1.2 CRITICAL INCIDENT SUPPORT SERVICES (CISS)

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1 Purpose

- 1.1 The NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) has an obligation and responsibility to ensure the health, safety and welfare of Service members involved in performing their duties.
- 1.2 Members of the NSW RFS may be confronted with a critical incident at some time throughout their Service membership. A critical incident is any situation faced in an operational context by emergency services personnel that may cause them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with their ability to function at the scene or later. It is the REACTION of the individual which makes the incident CRITICAL for that person, not necessarily the size or nature of the incident.
- 1.3 It is the responsibility of all members of the NSW RFS to be aware of critical incident stress to themselves and personnel under their control, and the management of same.

2 Definitions

- 2.1 For the purpose of this Policy Document the following definitions apply:
 - a. **CI:** Critical Incident
 - b. **CIS:** Critical Incident Stress
 - c. **CISM:** Critical Incident Stress Management
 - d. **CISS:** Critical Incident Support Services

3 Policy

- 3.1 All members of the NSW RFS must become aware of critical incident stress, the effects of a critical incident and the reactions which personnel may experience following exposure to a critical incident. All members must also become aware of the Critical Incident Support Services available to assist in the management of critical incident stress.
- 3.2 Each incident controller, team leader and manager must:
- a. Ensure safe systems of work are in place to minimise the likelihood of personnel experiencing critical incident stress;
 - b. Ensure that the personnel under their control have knowledge of critical incident stress and the Critical Incident Support Services available to them;
 - c. Monitor the personnel under their control to observe for critical incident stress reactions;
 - d. Provide immediate assistance and regular follow-up to personnel who are experiencing critical incident stress; and
 - e. Access the NSW RFS Critical Incident Support Services for assistance in critical incident stress management.

Critical Incidents

- 3.3 A critical incident does not have to be a major disaster, but it is usually sudden and out of the ordinary, and often involves death, or traumatic injury, or the possibility of either. The following are examples of the types of incidents which may present critical incident stress reactions for personnel:
- a. Death or serious injury to a fellow worker in the line of duty;
 - b. Exposure to gruesome sights – i.e. human remains, dead animals;
 - c. Failure to save a life, injury or loss;
 - d. Threat to life/safety of self or crew;
 - e. Motor vehicle accident involving personnel responding to an incident;
 - f. Equipment failure at critical times;
 - g. Responsibility for the lives and property of others;
 - h. Responding to other major disasters, for example earthquakes, aircraft/bus crashes, floods, storms, disease control;
 - i. Attendance at motor vehicle accidents which are severe or fatal;
 - j. Unexpected or unanticipated tragedy;
 - k. Incidents where there has been a large number of casualties; or
 - l. Where there are circumstances with which a person or group identifies, for example, where the victims are known to the person, or the incident brings back memories of past traumatic events.

Common reactions – Critical incident stress

- 3.4 Some common reactions of critical incident stress are outlined below. As individuals, each person will react differently to a critical incident and some may have no effects at all. Therefore the reactions provide a guide only. Some people may already experience some of these reactions as a result of life's stresses.
- 3.5 The most important indicator of critical incident stress is a significant change in a person's personality or lifestyle after a critical incident, which usually involves some of the following listed reactions.

a. In **physical** terms, someone involved in a critical incident may experience any of the following:

- › Nausea
- › Tremors
- › Profuse sweating
- › Diarrhoea
- › Rapid heart beat
- › Increased blood pressure
- › Muscle aches
- › Upset stomach
- › Feeling uncoordinated
- › Chills
- › Dizziness
- › Rapid breathing
- › Headaches
- › Sleep disturbances

b. **Mentally**, they may experience:

- › Slowed thinking
- › Confusion
- › Disorientation
- › Difficulty concentrating
- › Distressing dreams
- › Difficulty in problem solving
- › Difficulty making decisions
- › Difficulty calculating
- › Memory problems
- › Seeing the event over & over
- › Poor attention span

c. **Emotionally**, they may feel:

- › Anxiety
- › Guilt
- › Depression
- › Lost/lonely
- › Isolated
- › Wanting to hide
- › Startled
- › Wanting to limit contact with others
- › Fear
- › Grief
- › Sadness
- › Abandonment
- › Worry about others
- › Anger
- › Shock

d. **Behavioural** effects may include:

- › Withdrawal
- › Drug/alcohol abuse
- › Angry outbursts
- › Over-active vigilance

Critical Incident Support Services

3.6 The NSW RFS has a team of specially trained personnel, supported by the Counseling and Support Unit Manager, and Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) specialist consultants to assist in the provision of Critical Incident Support Services.

Activation of Critical Incident Support Services

- 3.7 Contact should be made on 1800 049 933 stating a request for CISS assistance, giving your contact telephone number and first name only.
- 3.8 The CISS Manager or CISS Duty Officer will return a call within 15 minutes of being contacted. Details of the incident and assistance required and deemed most suitable will be discussed with the contact person at that time.
- 3.9 CISS arrangements will be made as appropriate or other assistance/referrals made.
- 3.10 Confidentiality will be maintained. Minimal written documentation will be retained, to assist in statistical data analysis, enabling improvement of the programme and services provided for members.

Access to Critical incident Support Services

- 3.11 Individuals may seek assistance directly through the above mechanism.
- 3.12 Assistance may be sought through the Chaplaincy and Family Support Programs for non-operational critical incidents.

Education

- 3.13 Education/awareness sessions can be provided to members on critical incident stress and management of same. The session is of approximately one to one and a half hours duration, and is provided by CISS team members. This session can be incorporated into BF, VF, CL modules, or alternatively to brigade meetings, Captain's meetings, field days and similar activities. Contact should be made with the CISS Manager on (02) 8741 5223 during business hours, to arrange an education session.

4 Related documents

- > *Rural Fires Act 1997*
- > *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*

5 Amendments

AMENDMENT DATE	VERSION NO	DESCRIPTION
1 September 1999	1.0	Initial release
14 December 2009	1.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Updated to current format and to reflect realignment> Clauses 2.3.4(d) and 2.3.5(b) deleted
13 April 2016	1.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Complete review