

Appendix A
MF&RA Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)
Implementation Plan

1. Introduction

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MF&RA) have a responsibility to ensure as far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of its employees. In line with the MF&RA Health and Wellbeing Strategy we will develop our policies and procedures to provide appropriate health and wellbeing interventions which seek to remove barriers and aid employees to remain in work.

By the very nature of the Fire Service's work, employees (particularly operational employees) are at risk of exposure to potentially distressing events. Physical, emotional and psychological reactions to these events are normal (and not always negative). For the majority of time, most people will be able to function efficiently and manage their own reactions by drawing on existing coping strategies.

However, some people may experience negative reactions ranging from anxiety to depression; and this could have the potential to interfere with both work and home life.

People develop their own methods of coping with potentially distressing incidents in which they may have been exposed to. These methods may include peer support and humour, and may work well for most people most of the time. There is however a particular need for operational personnel to understand and be aware of the potential impact that could occur from being exposed to distressing incidents.

It is acknowledged that incidents occasionally may be so distressing for staff, or an everyday incident may have an unusually strong impact on staff, that these normal coping methods may not be satisfactory. These incidents are termed 'critical incidents'.

In compliance with the MF&RA Duty of Care, MF&RA are to develop a staff support programme incorporating the processes of education and awareness, defusing and debriefing.

Defusing and debriefing will provide a response to critical incidents; as well as promoting an understanding and developing a framework for the individual or team to manage any reactions encountered.

This implementation is aimed at being proactive, with the aim of helping personnel to realise that problems may be developing and signposting further help which is available should it be necessary.

This procedure will be administered by the Occupational Health Department, with the meetings being conducted by trained volunteers.

2. Aims

The critical incident procedure aims to:

- Ensure MF&RA have a single common approach to the process and support those who have been involved in critical incidents
- Provide a timely, high quality and confidential support service to employees
- Offer an opportunity to talk through potentially traumatic events using a structured approach; within a safe and controlled environment
- To enable personnel who have experienced distressing incidents within work to talk more easily about their emotions and feelings, in order to lessen any potential effects
- Identify those individuals who may require any additional/ ongoing support of Occupational Health and/or other health care professionals

3. Education and Awareness

A programme of presentations explaining the Critical Incident Management procedure will be delivered to all Service employees by members of the critical incident team.

Presentations will explain the process in full and ensure that all personnel understand that the procedure is aimed at assisting the long term physical and psychological health of MF&RA employees.

There is a need for employees, particularly operational personnel to understand and to be aware of the potential psychological impact from being exposed to traumatic incidents and how best to cope with any adverse reactions. In order to minimise any harm that may be triggered by psychological injury it is important that all personnel are aware of the potential impact and able to identify the symptoms of mental ill health.

Education and awareness around mental ill health and the possible reactions people may experience as a result of being exposed to potentially distressing incidents is important because:

- It prepares employees prior to potential exposure to critical incidents and the reactions/feelings they may experience thereafter; and can enhance an individual's coping skills
- It will help employees to recognise the signs and symptoms of mental ill health and inform them of how best to support their colleagues who may be experiencing mental ill health

- It will assist all employees to develop a more comprehensive understanding of mental ill health and associated problems

Induction presentations for new employees will include education and awareness of the nature of critical incidents, the potential of stress reactions, and the employee support afforded in the defusing/debriefing processes. Presentations will differ for uniformed/non uniformed recruits as expectations of what critical incidents they may experience whilst working for MF&RA will differ in nature.

All personnel during their induction programme will receive:

1. Occupational Health induction (Inc. Bridging Team)
2. Mental Health First Aid Training (MHFA) - 2 day course
3. A presentation on both the Service Critical Incident procedure and processes and on the critical incidents personnel may experience during their career with MF&RA. This is to be conducted by a member of the Critical Incident Debriefing Team (and presentations will vary dependant on operational/non operational induction personnel).

The Mental Health First Aid course can be provided by 2 MF&RA qualified Mental Health First Aid Instructors. Cost of this would be the release of the trainers (both admin staff) to conduct the course and cost of course materials, which would be £15 per participant with a maximum of 16 people per course (so maximum course cost materials would be £240).

When approaching retirement; personnel will continue to receive a presentation from Occupational Health that covers the area of both physical and mental health in retirement.

4. Critical Incident Debriefing Team and Defusing Officers

The Critical Incident Team will be managed by the Occupational Health Department. The Snr Occupational Health Officer will be the scheme coordinator.

Defusing Officers will be all Managers conditioned on the flexi duty system.

Defusing is a first line response and is set within the context of a range of support systems. It is an intervention which will aid to minimise any development of psychological injury and is recognised as such.

Defusing also identifies those personnel who may be at risk and for those who present ongoing symptoms that may well develop in to mental ill health such as post traumatic stress disorder. It also provides ongoing support to those who are being routinely exposed.

Defusing is a shortened version of debriefing but is more immediate in its application and therefore does not go as deep as the debriefing does. The Defusing will be conducted by a Service trained defusing officer.

Defusing should occur as soon as possible following the conclusion of the incident, always before personnel go off duty.

It offers the opportunity for those involved to talk briefly about their experience with the aim of reducing any intense reactions to the incident. Recognising similar reactions in other individuals can help and support each other in future incidents.

- Critical incident in the 'optional criteria' – Defusing is mandatory. Debriefing is optional, and the defusing officer will assess whether a debrief is required after the defusing session has been completed.
- Critical incident in the 'mandatory criteria' – Both defusing and debriefing are mandatory

The Debriefing Team will consist of MF&RA members from all levels of the Service.

A person at Director or Principle Officer Level would be asked to undertake the training also in order to show Service commitment to the procedure.

Critical incident debriefing is the second stage of preventative measures offered by MF&RA that are designed to minimise any harm that may be triggered by psychological injury.

Critical incident debriefing is a structured meeting where a group shares their experiences of the critical incident and reviews the facts, feelings and reactions that they have experienced during or after that incident. It is not counselling nor a regurgitation of a hot debrief.

The critical incident debriefing provides employees with a safe environment in which to talk. It is an aid in which to put events, thoughts and feelings in to perspective and raise awareness of personal reactions, as well as the reactions of their colleagues.

Confidentiality

The Defusing and Debriefing process is confidential and will adhere to the organisation's policy on confidentiality. However, it must be emphasised that confidentiality may be breached in circumstances where the individual is deemed to be a risk either to themselves, to other people or to MF&RA. If there is a conflict between these statements then it should be stressed that the safety of the individual and/or the safety of other members of our community takes precedence over confidentiality.

5. Critical Incident Team Training

The Critical Incident Debriefing Team will need to undertake a 3 day Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) course to become fully competent debriefers.

All debriefers will need to also undertake the 2 day Mental Health First Aid Course at a later date for development of skills purposes.

The Defusing Officers training would normally be a 1 day course to become competent in this area. The in house mental health first aid trainers would be trained to run the Defuser training themselves.

The Defusers should also complete the Mental Health First Aid course at a later date for development of skills purposes.

The volunteers in the Bridging team will be required to have completed the Mental Health First Aid training at a minimum.

6. Call out criteria for a Critical Incident Debrief

A Service critical incident is any situation faced by MF&RA personnel that may cause them to experience unusually strong emotions which could possibly affect their ability to function either at the scene/in work or later on.

Mandatory:

- Serious injury or death of a colleague
- Death of a child
- Incident involving horrific injury/ death
- Mass casualties/ fatalities
- Major disaster or incident
- Civil disturbance - an incident which contains high levels of violence or aggression towards fire crews

Optional:

- Incident involving a fatality
- Where the involved person is known to the firefighter(s)/ employee(s)
- Where crews are exposed to a series of traumatic events over a short period of time
- In the case of control staff, where an operator has handled an unusual, difficult or traumatic call
- An incident which may entail excessive media interest
- An incident in which the Senior Officers consider to be deemed 'critical'

This is not an exhaustive list of incidents or events that could be classified as potential triggers. It is important that the definition is flexible and applied at an incident where any attending Officer(s) consider it to be deemed critical. It is important to note that a critical incident can also be applied to non operational occurrences. The department's Senior Manager should be the person responsible for declaring a critical incident within their remit.

All personnel at the incident must attend the defusing session once they return to station but participation is voluntary.

If a full debrief is then still required as dictated by the Incident Commander/defusing officer, the necessary arrangements should then be arranged.

Crew members/non operational personnel should not be asked by the Senior Officer/ Department Manager if they require defusing, all incidents falling in to any of the mandatory/optional call out criteria should always be defused. If debriefing is to take place, then attendance at these sessions is voluntary. All those whom attended the critical incident however; are strongly encouraged to attend even if they feel they need no further support - their attendance may help someone who does.

It is important that MF&RA offer support to those who do not attend the debrief. An information pack offering advice will be given to personnel who despite strong recommendation, decline to attend the debriefing.

When debriefing takes place, the debriefing is normally led by 2 debriefing officers as soon as possible after 48 hours and when possible before 72 hours of the incident. If this time scale cannot be met due to shift patterns, then the debriefing should take place as soon as reasonably practical after this timeframe. To facilitate an effective debrief, the numbers attending should not exceed 10. In the event of a large incident it may be necessary to organise a number of debriefings. The debriefings must be held in a private room and be uninterrupted. An appropriate room to use will be identified between the Snr Occupational Health Officer and the relevant Incident Commander. When possible the crew should be taken 'off the run' for the duration of the meeting.

All group members will be asked to respect the content of the confidentiality of what takes place in the meeting, and apart from the names of those attending/not attending and date of the meeting, no report will be kept.

The debriefing will last approximately 1-2 hours, and at the conclusion the group will be offered an information leaflet and the opportunity to continue talking on a one to one basis or to obtain further help via Occupational Health.

The group will then be informed that a member of the Bridging Team will be visiting their premises of work within the next 7 days to offer further support.

At 3 month and 6 month intervals following attendance at a critical incident, personnel will be contacted on an individual basis to review their wellbeing. Further intervention support will be applied if necessary.

MF&RA personnel and their immediate family can also seek further help through the Employee Assistance Programme.

7. Procedure for Critical Incident Defusing and Debriefing

MACC will be contacted by the incident Senior Officer who will declare a critical incident.

MACC will record this on the incident log, and if no incident log exists, then one will be created. MACC will then email the critical incident team mailbox with the incident log details.

The incident Senior Officer on declaring a critical incident, will return to the station from where crews were mobilised and conduct a defusing session with the attending crew members. Where more than one station is involved in the incident then other flexi duty officers should be utilised to carry out defusing at these other locations. Prior to these officers attending stations they should, in the first instance, make contact with the incident Senior Officer to ensure they are aware of the incident details (all crew members must attend the defusing session).

After completion of the defusing session(s), the defusing officer (incident senior officer) will decide whether a full critical incident debrief is required or not.

The defusing officer will complete the relevant areas of the OSHENS debriefing module. The defusing officer will report within this module whether or not they request a full critical incident debrief.

If a critical incident debrief is not required the Critical Incident Team Coordinator will consider further interventions using the Bridging Team.

Once a debrief is requested, the Critical Incident Team Coordinator will arrange for a full incident debrief to be conducted. Debriefers will be nominated to attend whilst on duty, where possible, their attendance will be managed by Time and Resource Management in liaison with the Critical Incident Team Coordinator. The Critical Incident Team Coordinator will when possible select the debriefers in such a way that experience and expertise are equally met by those debriefers available.

Once arrangements for the debrief are established, the Critical Incident Team Coordinator will email the MACC Watch Officer with the details of date/time and location.

On completion of the debrief, the debriefing officer will complete the relevant OSHENS sections.

The MACC Watch Officer or a department Manager may request a critical incident debrief in the same way. The Critical Incident Team Coordinator will arrange the date, time, venue and debriefers for this.

The Critical Incident Team Coordinator will inform the relevant Area/Group Manager of these actions.

In liaison with the relevant Areas, the Snr Occupational Health Officer should:

- Obtain a copy of the incident from Vision Boss for the debriefers, together with a list of officers and appliances that attended the incident
- Identify individuals who have attended the incident
- Arrange a date, time, location for the debriefing
- Check that individuals are aware of the date and time of the debriefing
- If known and relevant, inform the debriefers of the current status of the person(s) involved in the incident

Debriefing Officers should allow for approximately 2 hour for the debriefing, but make themselves available at the end of the meeting to allow individuals to approach them with further concerns.

Debriefing sessions should not consist of more than groups of 10 people. If the number is greater than 10 then either a second debriefing session should be arranged on an alternative date, or an additional debriefing team should be sent to debrief the others.

It is important that all disruptions possible during the meeting should be minimised. Therefore, when possible the team should be taken off the run, and all mobile phones and pagers should be turned off.

Station personnel not involved in the meeting if possible should be utilised to ensure that appliances remain available to attend further fire call.

MACC will be informed of the start and finish times of all critical incident debriefing meetings.

Any individual who does not attend the meeting will be sent a letter and information leaflet from the Occupational Health Department.

Attendance/non attendees at the meeting should be recorded on the OSHENS Debriefing module by the debriefers. This is to ensure that all personnel receive the necessary follow-up support from the Occupational Health Department.

Those whom attended the debriefing sessions will receive follow up contact at 3 and 6 month intervals by the debrief coordinator to check on their welfare and see if any further support can be offered.

The debriefers do not make any verbal or written reports as to the content of conversations. The level of confidentiality will, at all times, be respected by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service.

After a Critical Incident Debriefing meeting has been conducted; the debriefing officers will be contacted and debriefed themselves by the Critical Incident Coordinator. This is in order to check on the health and wellbeing of the debriefing officer.

The Critical Incident process will be monitored and recorded in the OSHENS debriefing module. The Occupational Health scheme coordinator supported by Health and Safety will be responsible for ensuring all OSHENS details in the debriefing module for critical incidents are completed and updated.

Scheme Coordinator

The Snr Occupational Health Officer will act as an overall coordinator of the Scheme. Occupational Health will work closely with Health and Safety in this area and a Health and Safety Officer will be appointed to assist the coordinator and be a point of contact.

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE FLOWCHART

MACC CONTACTED BY INCIDENT SENIOR OFFICER TO DECLARE A CRITICAL INCIDENT
 (MACC RECORD ON INCIDENT LOG AND SEND DETAILS TO CRITICAL INCIDENT MAILBOX)

AT INCIDENT CONCLUSION, CREW(S) RETURN TO THE STATION THEY ARE MOBILISED FROM AND DEFUSED BY SENIOR OFFICER (DEFUSING OFFICER)

SENIOR OFFICER TO ESTABLISH WHETHER DEBRIEF IS REQUIRED UNDER OPTIONAL OR MANDATORY CRITERIA AS PER GUIDANCE

CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEF IS REQUIRED
 DEFUSING OFFICER TO UPDATE OSHENS

CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEF NOT REQUIRED
 DEFUSING OFFICER TO UPDATE OSHENS.

 CRITICAL INCIDENT TEAM COORDINATOR WILL CONSIDER ANY FURTHER INTERVENTION VIA OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SERVICES.

CRITICAL INCIDENT TEAM COORDINATOR TO LIAISE WITH INCIDENT SENIOR OFFICER TO ESTABLISH DATE, TIME AND LOCATION TO HOLD CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEF MEETING –
OSHENS UTILISED TO REQUEST ATTENDEES
 (WHERE POSSIBLE MEETING SHOULD BE HELD AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER 48 HOURS AND PREFERABLY NOT LATER THAN 72 HOURS AFTER THE INCIDENT)

CRITICAL INCIDENT TEAM COORDINATOR/T&RM TO NOMINATE 2 DEBRIEFING OFFICERS AND PROVIDE WITH DETAILS OF INCIDENT

CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEF TAKES PLACE

AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE DEBRIEFING; DEBRIEFING OFFICER(S) TO UPDATE OSHENS

ANYONE NOT ATTENDING DEBRIEF TO BE SENT STANDARD LETTER, RELEVANT LEAFLETS AND EAP FREEPHONE DETAILS BY CRITICAL INCIDENT TEAM COORDINATOR

CRITICAL INCIDENT TEAM COORDINATOR TO CONTACT DEFUSERS AND DEBRIEFERS TO DISCUSS ANY ISSUES AND LIAISE WITH SERVICE CHAPLAIN

CRITICAL INCIDENT TEAM COORDINATOR TO ENSURE ALL DETAILS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN OSHENS

CRITICAL INCIDENT TEAM COORDINATOR TO SEND OUT POST INCIDENT DEBRIEF QUESTIONNAIRE TO ALL ATTENDEES (AT SET INTERVALS)

SERVICE CHAPLAIN TO ARRANGE VISIT TO STATION(S) BY A BRIDGING TEAM MEMBER PREFERABLY WITHIN 7 DAYS OF DEBRIEF

INCIDENT CLOSED