



MONTGOMERY COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD

DIRECTIVE

Number: 00 - 32

Date: December 18, 2000

To: All MCFRS Personnel

From:  Gordon A. Aoyagi, Fire Administrator

Subject: Critical Incident Stress Program

The Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service recognizes that Critical Incident Stress may have a negative impact on service personnel and their loved ones unless it is effectively addressed through a variety of resources. A system must be in place to deal with the stress of emergency responses both pre-incident and post-incident. Through a joint labor and management initiative several areas of action have been identified to assure that we have a program in place to provide the best support available to all our personnel. We should not consider this a program for either labor or management, career or volunteer – it is a firefighter/rescuer program to help each other.

The initiative identifies short-term or immediate response issues related to an incident or occurrence while long-term, permanent programs are being evaluated to assure pre-incident education and prevention measures are provided to all members of the service. The labor/management initiative will continue to research and develop program improvements. The team leaders for the Critical Incident Stress Program are Captain Fred Probst (station 2A) and Master Paramedic Stacey Daniel (station 14C). If you are interested in assisting with the program in any way please contact either of them.

In the interim, MCFRS must be responsive to the immediate needs of our personnel. As a result, we have jointly established automatic call-down procedures for specific critical incident stress situations as identified in the attached document.

A phone line with voice mail and automatic pager notification has been established to facilitate support when an incident occurs. This number is established to assure that all personnel, whether personally affected by an incident, or those who are aware of or concerned about an incident affecting other MCFRS members, can receive critical incident stress support. This voice mail system will allow confidential concerns to be expressed by service personnel.

The Critical Incident Stress contact number is: (240) 777-2277. To activate the system, leave a message as well as your contact information and the on-duty CIS facilitator will be automatically paged and will return your call. The attached document details the use of this line and our approach to these incidents.

Interim Critical Incident Stress Management Team Activation Procedures

The Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service recognizes that Critical Incident Stress (CIS) may have a negative impact on service personnel and their loved ones unless it is effectively addressed through a variety of resources. A system must be in place to deal with the stress of emergency responses both pre-incident and post-incident. Through a joint labor and management initiative several areas of action have been identified to assure that we have a program in place to provide the best support available to our personnel. We should not consider this a program for either labor or management, career or volunteer – it is a firefighter/rescuer program to help each other.

The service must be responsive to the immediate needs of our personnel and as a result, we have jointly established the following interim process for dealing with Critical Incident Stress issues. This interim process will include automatic call-down in specific situations as identified below.

A phone line with voice mail and automatic pager notification has been established to facilitate support when an incident occurs. This number is established to assure that all personnel, whether personally affected by an incident, or those who are aware of or concerned about an incident affecting other MCFRS members, can receive critical incident stress support. This voice mail system will allow confidential concerns to be expressed by service personnel.

The Critical Incident Stress contact number is: (240) 777-2277. This document details the use of this line and our interim approach to critical incident stress incidents.

Definitions

1. Critical incident - any traumatic event which causes fire/rescue and emergency medical service personnel to experience an extreme emotional response.
2. Critical Incident Stress Management Team – a group of trained personnel used to provide support to Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS) members in the event of an incident that could potentially cause psychological or personal crisis. The team is made up of Peer Counselors, Mental Health Professionals, the Family Support Network and outside resources.
3. Debriefing – a confidential, educational process provided by mental health professionals with the support of peers and other appropriate resources, usually provided within 72 hours of the incident, designed to accelerate the normal recovery process in the individuals who have been exposed to highly abnormal events.
4. Defusing – an information session provided immediately after a critical incident to offer information and support regarding potential personal reaction expectations and to assess the need for a formal debriefing. Peer support personnel usually perform the defusing.

5. Family Support Network – Family members of MCFRS personnel, who have been trained to deal with persons experiencing an emotional response to an incident, will work to ensure that the family members, who are effected by a critical incident, have their needs met.
6. Mental Health Professionals – Montgomery County Crisis Center professionals will be the key players dealing with the mental health aspect of critical incident stress management. They will work in tandem with MCFRS CISM on-duty facilitator to decide what actions will take place to assure proper support in a given circumstance.
7. On-call Facilitator – Team members who are assigned on a rotating basis as the contact for calls to the CIS contact line. These personnel facilitate response activities as required.
8. Outside resources – Individual counseling, spiritual counseling or any other type of additional support needed for a particular incident.
9. Peer Counselors – Members of the MCFRS who have been trained to deal with persons experiencing an emotional response to an incident. These personnel are utilized as a first line of support and for defusing in response to a critical incident. Peers are an integral part of the program because of their familiarity with and interest in the Fire/Rescue culture.
10. Team Activation – Phone/pager notification of the on-duty facilitator and a voice response to the calling party. Based on this contact the on-duty facilitator determines the level of resources required for immediate support of the situation.
11. Team Leader – Personnel assigned by the Fire Administrator to lead the Critical Incident Stress Management team.

Team Activation

Any member of the MCFRS can request the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) team. Additionally, an Incident Commander (IC), the officer in charge (OIC) of a unit, a station officer, or an individual may approach the OIC and discuss the need for CISM intervention.

An individual may feel more comfortable reaching out for support through the MC Crisis Center, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or the MCFRS in-house counseling program. In any case all contacts will be handled with confidentiality.

The Team can be contacted 24 hours a day through (240) 777-2277. A voice message can be left and the on-duty facilitator's pager will be activated.

Mandated Team Activation

The CISM on-duty facilitator will be contacted in the event of the following incidents:

- A. Serious injury or death of a MCFRS member at the incident scene or en route;
- B. Mass casualty incidents;
- C. Suicide of a MCFRS member;

- D. Serious injury or death of a civilian resulting from/caused by MCFRS operations;
- 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;
- G. An unusual incident that could trigger a profound emotional reaction.

In the above-cited circumstances the emergency communication center (ECC) will dial (240) 777-2277 and leave a voice mail description of the event and appropriate contact information.

CISM on-duty facilitator contact will be considered by the OIC for the following incidents:

- A. Incidents that attract extremely unusual or extensive media coverage;
- B. Incidents in which circumstances are unusually bizarre.

Activation of the CISM team:

The CISM on-duty facilitator is contacted via message and pager system (240)-777-2277.

The on-duty facilitator contacts the calling party to gather specific information.

The on-duty facilitator contacts the MC Crisis Center to discuss the appropriate course of action based on the particular incident at hand.

If needed, outside resources are contacted.

If required, peer support personnel are notified for a scheduled defusing.

At the defusing, the need for a debriefing will be evaluated.

The need for further personal intervention will be assessed and appropriate individual support will be provided utilizing MCFRS resources.

Additionally, on-site support may be provided for critical incidents of extreme magnitude or prolonged duration. Members of the team may provide on site consultation and may also serve as advisors to the IC. The team is alert for acute stress reactions, may provide support to victims, fire and rescue service personnel and the family members of affected personnel.

December 12, 2000