



CORPORATE POLICY STATEMENT NO. 27

MANAGING THE EFFECTS OF CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS

April 2016

1. OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 To provide corporate guidance and direction on the management of the effects of critical incidents and potentially traumatic events.
- 1.2 To specify the support framework that is in place and will be made available to staff members, contractors and volunteers in order to reduce the associated effects of an incident or event.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies primarily to Department of Parks and Wildlife (the department) staff members, contractors and volunteers who have been affected by a critical incident or a potentially traumatic event whilst undertaking departmental work duties. Support will also be provided to staff who are personally affected by non-work related events that may occur out of hours.

3. CONTEXT

Parks and Wildlife staff members, contractors and volunteers may be exposed to critical incidents or potentially traumatic events through the various roles and functions carried out by the department. These incidents and events are characterised by demands on staff that go beyond people's level of resilience in the circumstances. For purposes of this policy the following definitions apply:

Critical incident: A critical incident is an incident that can both evoke unusually strong emotional reactions and have the potential to interfere with the ability of personnel to function appropriately. It is the unique context in which incidents occur, and the potential for strong negatively perceived emotional reactions by the personnel involved, that determines whether incidents are critical.

Potentially traumatic event: A potentially traumatic event usually involves personnel having witnessed or experienced events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of themselves or others.

Reactions to extreme events typically include physical, behavioural, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual responses. It is common for people to feel a wide range of emotions such as feeling frightened, shocked, numb, sad, guilty, frustrated, angry and helpless. These reactions are normal and, in most cases, will gradually become less intense after a few weeks. For some people, these problems can last longer and start interfering with their ability to undertake normal work and maintain their general wellbeing and responsibilities outside of work. Some people may not exhibit symptoms for a considerable time following an event.

Early intervention increases personal recovery from a critical incident or a potentially traumatic event. The department will provide initial assistance to staff including practical and emotional support, information and ongoing monitoring that is tailored to individual needs and provided as soon as feasible. This is known as psychological first aid.

Related Policies and Procedures

[Corporate Guideline No. 27 – Managing the Effects of Critical Incident Stress.](#)

[Corporate Guideline No. 6 – Reporting of and Responding to Emergencies and Critical Incidents.](#)

4. LEGISLATION

Parks and Wildlife provides a general duty of care to employees in accordance with the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984*, although there are no specific provisions for trauma and stress related exposures in the workplace.

5. POLICY

The department will:

- 5.1 develop and maintain detailed current best practice guidelines for managing staff members, contractors and volunteers affected by critical incidents and potentially traumatic events;
- 5.2 in consultation with the Chaplain provide rapid and tailored advice, arrangements and psychological first aid assistance to individuals or groups affected by a critical incident or a potentially traumatic event;
- 5.3 treat each incident or event on a case-by-case basis according to the extent, severity and duration of effects on people;
- 5.4 ensure that any information relating to an affected individual is treated confidentially except where it is required to support medical or other care for an individual;
- 5.5 maintain sufficient staff trained in psychological first aid to undertake the duties identified in the guidelines;
- 5.6 engage professional qualified services to assess, and where necessary assist potentially affected individuals in consultation with the Chaplain ; and
- 5.7 prepare and distribute brochures, information sheets and relevant reference materials including web-based resources.

6. STANDARDS

The department's approach to psychological first aid is aligned to current best practice methods as endorsed by the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia.

7. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The **Director General** is responsible for approval of this policy, ensuring that the resources are in place to enable the policy to be implemented and managing or delegating the management of any departmental response to a critical incident or potentially traumatic event.

All **managers and supervisors** are responsible for implementation of the policy, guidelines and procedures. They will provide assistance to staff members, contractor and volunteers affected by a critical incident or potentially traumatic event and will allocate the use of appropriate resources. They will monitor the needs and response of staff from any critical incident or potentially traumatic event.

The **local manager** is responsible for ongoing case management post-incident unless alternative arrangements are put in place.

The **Chaplain** is responsible for activation of critical incident peer responders in consultation with the local manager.

Manager Employee Relations and Safety in consultation with managers and the Chaplain, will take steps to confirm the existence and significance of critical incident stress, arrange regular contacts, assessment and where necessary, counselling or other forms of intervention as required.

In accordance with the policy, guidelines and procedures; all **staff members** are encouraged to report any suspected effects from a critical incident or potentially traumatic event on themselves or others to their supervisor or one of the above listed managers.

8. CUSTODIAN

Director Corporate Services Division.

9. PUBLICATION

This policy will be made available on the department's website and intranet.

10. KEY WORDS

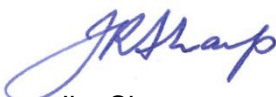
Critical incident; potentially traumatic event; psychological first aid; post-traumatic stress; occupational safety and health; mental health; early intervention; disaster recovery; critical incident peer responder; chaplain; employee assistance program; counselling; psychologist.

11. REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed no later than five years from the date of approval.

12. DIRECTOR GENERAL APPROVAL

Approved by



Jim Sharp
DIRECTOR GENERAL

Effective date: 15 April 2016