

HANDLING A CRITICAL INCIDENT AT THE WORKPLACE

To be prepared is to show you care. To lessen the effects of a traumatic incident such as a workplace fatality on you and your employees, a Serious Incident Plan with an established policy statement and procedures in place will be helpful. The fact that you are prepared will help to decrease the incidence of post traumatic stress disorder, promote healthy recovery and demonstrate to employees that management cares.

- Ensure that you have a trained supervisor on staff who will help you and your staff in the event of a workplace fatality. The Canadian Critical Incident Stress Foundation (CCISF) provides training programs for events such as these. They can be reached at (705) 739-6226.
- In the event of an accident, contact the police and ambulance services. Determine who will notify the family and put guidelines in your procedural plan.
- Once the police and emergency service teams leave, have your trained CCISF supervisor gather staff together to talk informally about what has happened.
- Provide healthy food and drink, especially if the site is going to remain open and employees are expected to return to work.
- Allow employees time to rest and eat before returning to work or going home.
- Ensure that affected employees are either accompanied home or have a reasonable plan to get there.
- Inform those involved that a counseling session will be held later on. **Ensure that professional trauma assistance is on-site within 24 to 72 hours.**

The WSIB provides this service. A WSIB Crisis Intervention Counsellor will contact you within 24 hours of notification of a fatal accident.

The following procedures should be included in your Serious Incident Plan:

- Immediately contact by telephone or fax, the local office of the Ministry of Labour. Within 48 hours, the employer must also notify, in writing, the Ministry of Labour, giving the circumstances of the incident. (*Section 51(1), Occupational Health and Safety Act*)
- Contact the WSIB as soon as possible through your Account Manager or Customer Service Representative, or call the Occupational Disease and Survivor Benefits Program at (416) 344-1010 or 1-800-465-9646; or
- Fax the Employer's Report of Injury/Disease (Form 7) to (416) 344-2380.

The Facts

- A fatal accident on the job can affect co-workers, particularly those who witnessed the accident and those who provided assistance at the scene.
- Employees subjected to intense trauma may experience a strong emotional or physical reaction. In some cases, the employee may suffer both emotional and physical reactions.
- Stress reactions can occur at any point ranging from immediately after the incident, a few hours after the incident or even a few days or a few months after the incident.
- There is no hard and fast rule regarding stress reaction. The symptoms may last a few days, weeks or months depending on the severity of the traumatic incident and each employee's ability to cope.
- As an employer, you should be aware of the signs and symptoms of stress reaction. Symptoms fall into four categories; physical, mental, emotional and behavioral.

Signs and Symptoms of a Stress Reaction

Physical: chills, thirst, fatigue, nausea, upset stomach, vomiting, hyperventilation (rapid breathing), difficulty breathing, headaches, loss of appetite, muscle soreness, profuse sweating, dizziness, fainting, increased appetite, etc. Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for medical attention. When in doubt, advise your employee to consult a physician.

Mental: confusion, nightmares, uncertainty, hyper-vigilance, intrusive images, assigning blame, impaired thinking, impaired decision-making, disorientation of time/place/person, memory problems, difficulty concentrating, poor attention span, heightened or lowered alertness, etc.

Emotional: fear, guilt, grief, panic, denial, anxiety, agitation, irritability, inappropriate emotional response, feelings of helplessness, etc.

Behavioural: withdrawal, restlessness, intensified pacing, erratic movements, change in social activity, change in speech patterns, unusual risk-taking, avoidance through use of drugs or alcohol, moodiness, isolating behaviour, difficulty sleeping, etc.

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**** Provided as general information only. A physician should always be consulted for diagnosis and treatment of any and all medical conditions.***