



# Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Wildland Fire and Aviation



WASHINGTON STATE DEPT OF  
**NATURAL  
RESOURCES**

Last Updated 2024

# Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	0
What is CISM at DNR? .....	2
CISM Provides: .....	2
CISM in DNR Includes:.....	2
Types of CIPS Team Response: .....	3
What CISM and CIPS Teams are not: .....	3
CISM in DNR: FAQ .....	4
What is CISM?.....	4
What is involved with a Critical Incident Peer Support (CIPS) Team? .....	4
How do I request a CIPS Team response in my work unit? .....	4
How do I request a CIPS Team response if I'm at a fire? .....	5
How does DNR mobilize a CIPS Team? .....	5
How is DNR training people? .....	5
Who are the right employees to be trained in CISM?.....	5
Why are we building this program? .....	6
What legal considerations are there for CISM trained Peer Supporters? .....	6
CISM and Peer Support Definitions.....	7
Critical Incident.....	7
Crisis Management Briefing (CMB).....	7
Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) .....	7
Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM).....	7
Critical Incident Stress Management Response .....	7
Defusing.....	7
Peer Support.....	8
CISM: <i>Critical Incident Stress Management Member</i> .....	8
CISL: <i>Critical Incident Stress Management Leader</i> .....	8
Stress First Aid .....	8
Family Liaison .....	8
Hospital Liaison.....	8

# What is CISM at DNR?

Critical Incident Stress can occur in any DNR workplace, wildland fire related or not. Wildland firefighters (WFFs) often and unavoidably experience stressful and traumatic situations that can lead to emotional and behavioral health problems, including anxiety, burnout, depression, alcoholism, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal ideation, and suicide (Deppa, 2015).

Critical incidents are often extremely stressful events that can overwhelm one's usual coping mechanisms. The incident itself does not define a critical incident; the individuals and/or an organization's reaction to what occurred determines a critical incident. These incidents are likely to become part of the agency's history and can influence the culture of the entire DNR and wildland fire community.

## **CISM Provides:**

- A systematic approach to address everyday stressors as well as crises intervention protocols.
- Mitigate impacts of traumatic events, accelerate recovery process, and assess need for additional mental health services.
- Skills to build resilience to adversity, improve performance, and foster mental preparedness.
- Greater ability to bounce back after a crisis, extremely stressful situation, or critical incident.

## **CISM in DNR Includes:**

- Pre-incident education (PIE), which includes resiliency, planning and preparedness, acute crisis management, and post- incident follow up.
- Crisis intervention provided through trained and carefully selected peer supporters and licensed Mental Health Professionals (MHP) who specialize in trauma and understand WFFs; trust and safety are critical to success.
- Peer relationships built around mutual understanding, respect, and trust; provides the credibility necessary for developing relationships in which individuals are willing to open up and discuss their experiences despite concerns about stigma.

- Critical Incident Peer Support Groups (CIPS) offer education, social support, and provide avenues for additional help when needed; Peer Supporters should never be used as a replacement for professional care (when necessary) and should never function independently; CIPS Groups are assembled at the time of need and are comprised of trained personnel selected to match the backgrounds and experience of those involved in the critical incident (i.e. crew, helitack, engines, dispatchers, etc.).

## **Types of CIPS Team Response:**

- **Crisis Management Briefings (CMB)** are used to convey information for any event with impact on a large group (30-45 min).
- **Defusing is used for any event that impacts a close-knit group** (i.e. engine crew, helitack crew, finance section, etc.); up to 8 hours following a critical incident (20-45 min).
- **Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD)** is used for any event that impacts a close-knit group; 24-72 hours post event; very interactive group process with 7 specific stages (1-3 hours).
- **SAFER-R Model (Stabilization, Acknowledgment, Facilitate Understanding, Encouragement, Recovery, and Referral) of Individual Crisis Intervention** is used to support individuals in crisis.

## **What CISM and CIPS Teams are not:**

- Peer support is not psychotherapy or counseling. It is not a treatment for PTSD, nor is it intended as a substitute for any of these treatments.
- CIPS is not a critique or investigation of the traumatic event.
- Mediation, addressing administrative issues, performing hospital liaison or family liaison duties, or providing funeral/memorial service support is outside the scope and training for peer supporters. However, there are good examples of why CISM trained peer supporters might also be good candidates to perform these other duties prescribed by the Agency.

# CISM in DNR: FAQ

## What is CISM?

Critical Incident Stress Management, commonly called CISM, is a structured form of peer support for employees provided by peers and typically under the consultation of a certified mental health professional. Often Critical Incident Peer Support (CIPS) Teams are ordered for critical incidents, such as line of duty deaths, serious accidents or injuries, suicide, or off duty deaths.

CISM provides:

- Systematic approach to address everyday stressors, as well as crises intervention protocols.
- Mitigate impacts of traumatic events, accelerate recovery process, and assess need for additional mental health services.
- Skills to build resilience to adversity, improve performance, and foster mental preparedness.
- Greater ability to bounce back after a crisis, extremely stressful situation, or critical incident.

## What is involved with a Critical Incident Peer Support (CIPS) Team?

A CIPS Team interacts with an individual or group that has been affected by a traumatic event or events. Depending on the nature of the incident or accident, the team can be scalable to have the right response with the right people at the right time. Typically, there will be a Mental Health Provider and Critical Incident Stress Team Leader (CISL) along with a couple of Critical Incident Stress Team Members (CISM).

DNR is working collectively with other wildland fire agencies to have CISM qualified peer supporters available to respond throughout Washington and other States as requested.

## How do I request a CIPS Team response in my work unit?

Requests for a formal CIPS Team response should be routed through the chain of command up to the Appointing Authority (Region/Division Manager) and communicated with the Wildland Fire Management Division's Operations Assistant Division Manager. Depending on the incident, the Operations Section will coordinate with affected management (Safety Office, Workplace Culture Development (WCD), Regions, State Lands, Forest Regulation, etc.) to determine how it will be paid for, right-size the response, assemble a CIPS Team, consider whether to execute a contract for a mental health professional, and mobilize a response.

## **How do I request a CIPS Team response if I'm at a fire?**

Large fire incident management teams are becoming more familiar with CISM and have probably already initiated the process to request a CIPS Team if a significant Incident Within an Incident (IWI) occurred. The recommended approach would be to work through the Safety Officer to articulate the request for help.

For other fires without an IMT, work through your chain of command to discuss a formal response.

## **How does DNR mobilize a CIPS Team?**

If the CIPS team is mobilizing to a Fire related CISM response, the traditional Resource Order process used for the interagency fire response will be followed and coordinated by Wildfire Management Division's (WFMD) Operations Section. DNR's CISM qualified resources could be called to support DNR fire related incidents throughout Washington and in other states.

If the CIPS team is mobilizing to another critical incident, not related to fire, case by case determinations for funding and travel will be decided upon by affected DNR Management. Mobilization will be coordinated accordingly.

## **How is DNR training people?**

The Wildland Fire Management Division and Regions are working to build our ranks with people who have had this training so we can effectively take care of our own. In the Fire Training Handbook there are 2 red card qualifications. A CISM is a Critical Incident Stress Management Member and a CISL is a Critical Incident Stress Management Leader. There are 2 classes that help deliver this information and skillset.

N9071- Basic CISM (ICISF's Assisting Individuals in Crisis & Group Crisis intervention)

N9072-Advanced CISM (ICISF's Advanced Assisting Individuals in Crisis & Group Crisis Intervention)

There are no Position Task Books for these qualifications. Documented performance will be required to show competency before becoming qualified.

## **Who are the right employees to be trained in CISM?**

Being a part of a CIPS Team calls for a high level of personal and emotional resilience because you are going to be talking to people about traumatic events. These conversations are challenging and take the right person to engage and support. CISM teams will facilitate Individual and Group Crisis Intervention De-Briefings or De-Fusings with the personnel most affected by the critical incident, or those who ask for the help.

CISM trained Peer Supporters should be interested and willing to help, while they also need to have personal emotional stability to be able to withstand the critical incident related stress that occurs as part of a response.

## **Why are we building this program?**

Mental Health is becoming more of a known subject that is being addressed by land management agencies to take care of their employees and build a resilient workforce that is able to speak up and ask for help if it is needed. A culture shift in the wildland fire community is happening and more individuals are asking / seeking help to work through traumatic events that take place in our field.

## **What legal considerations are there for CISM trained Peer Supporters?**

RCW 5.60.060 (6)

(a) A peer support group counselor shall not, without consent of the peer support group client making the communication, be compelled to testify about any communication made to the counselor by the peer support group client while receiving counseling. The counselor must be designated as such by the agency employing the peer support group client prior to the incident that results in counseling. The privilege only applies when the communication was made to the counselor while acting in his or her capacity as a peer support group counselor. The privilege does not apply if the counselor was an initial responding first responder, department of corrections staff person, or jail staff person; a witness; or a party to the incident which prompted the delivery of peer support group counseling services to the peer support group client.

(v) "Peer support group counselor" means:

(A) A first responder, department of corrections staff person, or jail staff person or a civilian employee of a first responder entity or agency, local jail, or state agency who has received training to provide emotional and moral support and counseling to a peer support group client who needs those services as a result of an incident in which the peer support group client was involved while acting in his or her official capacity; or

(B) A nonemployee counselor who has been designated by the first responder entity or agency, local jail, or state agency to provide emotional and moral support and counseling to a peer support group client who needs those services as a result of an incident in which the peer support group client was involved while acting in his or her official capacity.

DNR's ICISF CISM trained Peer Supporters meet the definition of Peer support group counselor when designated as a CISM or CISL responder and acting in that capacity as a peer support group counselor.

# CISM and Peer Support Definitions

## Critical Incident

Unusually challenging events that have the potential to create significant human distress and can overwhelm the usual coping mechanisms of an individual or a group. They are typically sudden, powerful events, which are outside the range of ordinary human experiences.

## Crisis Management Briefing (CMB)

This is a structured meeting designed to provide information about the incident, control rumors, educate about symptoms of distress, inform about basic stress management, and identify resources available for continued support, if desired. The goals of a CMB include providing factual information, instilling a sense of leadership, reducing chaos, and enhancing credibility. The CMB is designed to assist those involved directly or indirectly with the incident and is not intended for the media.

## Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD)

A **small group** crisis intervention tool designed to assist a homogeneous group of people **after** an exposure to the same significant traumatic event. It is not a stand-alone process and should only be used as part of an integrated package of interventions within the peer support program. CISD's generally occur within 24 hours to 1 week after the critical incident.

## Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)

A comprehensive, phase sensitive, and integrated, multi-component approach to crisis intervention. CISM is a coordinated program of tactics that are linked and blended together to alleviate the reactions to traumatic experiences.

## Critical Incident Stress Management Response

Resources activated by the CISM Coordinator to respond to a critical incident. Group members may include chaplains, peer support and/or mental health professionals.

## Defusing

A **small group** crisis intervention tool designed to assist a homogeneous group of people **after** an exposure to the same significant traumatic event. The purpose of a defusing is to mitigate the impact of the event, accelerate the recovery process, and assess the need for additional services. This occurs 24 hours after the incident.



## **Peer Support**

Providing crisis intervention services by fellow employees who have received specific training in crisis intervention, communication, stress management and other related topics. Peer supporters are available to assist co-workers, managers, and other employees during times of crisis, critical incidents, or traumatic events.

## ***CISM: Critical Incident Stress Management Member***

Red Card qualification for an employee who has been through the Basic CISM courses and is able to be dispatched through IROC to support the mobilization of the CISM Team for fire incidents.

## ***CISL: Critical Incident Stress Management Leader***

Red Card Qualification for an employee who has been through the Advanced CISM courses and is able to be dispatched through IROC to support the mobilization of the CISM Team for fire incidents.

## **Stress First Aid**

Stress First Aid (SFA) is a curriculum that was developed initially for the US military and was later edited to be a curriculum for first responders who work in high stress environments. SFA is a set of supportive actions designed to help you with self-care and coworker support to mitigate the negative impacts of stress and develop resiliency amongst the workforce.

## **Family Liaison**

The family liaison is critical in facilitating communication between the agency and the family. The family liaison must be capable of ensuring that agency needs are met while providing assistance to families. This balancing act occurs in an emotionally charged atmosphere that can be stressful to the liaison. Agencies should be mindful of selecting the appropriate person to act as family liaison. Select one family liaison per family but consider the need for other individuals to assist.

## **Hospital Liaison**

The hospital liaison is critical in facilitating communication between the hospital and the injured employee. Some of the primary purposes are to provide aid and comfort to fellow employees who have been injured or are suffering illness and require treatment from a medical provider or hospitalization. Also to provide a contact for the patient to assist with necessary paperwork, advocate for appropriate patient care, and communicate with the employee's supervisor, Safety office, and appointed authorities. Lastly, to facilitate meeting the needs of the patient and his/her family.