

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)

Washington State Department of Natural Resources



What is a Critical Incident?

A critical incident is any unusually challenging event powerful enough to overwhelm an individual's usual ability to cope — typically sudden, unexpected, and outside the range of ordinary experience.

Examples include:

- Death or serious injury of an employee, on or off duty
- Natural or human-made disasters
- Mass casualty events
- Officer-involved shooting or victim of a crime
- Suicide
- Extended search and rescue operations
- Direct contact with dead or dying people
- Any powerful or traumatic event

Common Reactions

After a critical incident, employees may experience:

- Difficulty concentrating or sleep disturbances
- Fatigue, irritability, or nightmares
- Withdrawal from others
- Depression, anxiety, or feeling overwhelmed
- Poor workplace performance

These are normal responses to abnormal events. Support is available.

Program Confidentiality

Participation in a CISM Team and CISM Response is voluntary. What you share with a CISM Peer Support Team Member is private and confidential, with a few exceptions. Under *RCW 5.60.060*, CISM peer support communications are legally privileged. CISM Team Members cannot be required by management to disclose what they learn in a peer support capacity.

What is CISM?

CISM is a group process led by CISM Team Members and mental health professionals. A CISM response helps participants understand the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that arise in the aftermath of a critical incident. CISM also helps to mitigate the impacts of traumatic events, accelerate the recovery process, and assess the need for additional mental health services.

CISM is not ongoing professional mental health treatment, counseling, or therapy, and it does not create a medical record. It is also not a safety report, investigation, or evaluation of anyone's actions. CISM's sole purpose is to provide short-term, peer-based support after a difficult incident.

What CISM Offers

Services differ based on incidents. Examples include:

- **On-Scene Support:** Immediate support at or near the incident.
- **Defusing:** Small group session shortly after an incident (20–45 min).
- **Crisis Management Briefing (CMB):** Structured group meeting for larger groups (20–30 min).
- **Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD):** In-depth group process for close-knit groups, 24–72 hours post-incident (1–3 hrs).
- **Individual Crisis Intervention (SAFER-R):** One-on-one support for individuals in acute crisis.
- **Referrals:** Connections to professional mental health services or the WA State Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Confidentiality Limits and Exceptions:

- When the employee is likely to cause harm to themselves or to others.
- When the employee discloses serious criminal activity or policy violations that jeopardize health and/or safety.
- When the CISM-trained Peer Supporter suspects or finds out that child, elder, or spouse abuse has occurred.

How to Request a CISM Response

Any DNR employee may request a CISM response. You do not need to be certain a CISM response is needed — a CISM Team Leader will make that determination. You may also contact a CISM Team member directly for informal, confidential support at any time, without a formal request.

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| Wildland Fire Management Division Employees | Contact a designated CISM Team member or leader, your supervisor, a supervisor outside your chain of command, or WFMD's Fire Operations Assistant Division Manager or Fire Operations Specialists. |
| Region Employees | Contact your Region's designated CISM Team point of contact, your supervisor, or a manager/supervisor outside your chain of command. |
| Division Employees | Contact your supervisor, a manager/supervisor outside your chain of command, or WFMD's Fire Operations Assistant Division Manager or Fire Operations Specialists. |
| Managers and Supervisors | WFMD: Contact WFMD's Fire Operations Assistant Division Manager. |
| | Regions: Contact your Region's CISM Team point of contact or WFMD's Fire Operations Assistant Division Manager or Fire Operations Specialists. |
| | Divisions/Offices: Contact WFMD's Fire Operations Assistant Division Manager or Fire Operations Specialists. |
| On a Fire Incident | Work with the Safety Officer at the incident to request support. For fires without an Incident Management Team, work through your chain of command. |

Additional Resources

WA State Employee Assistance Program

Free and confidential counseling and referral services for all state employees.

Visit: eap.wa.gov

Access Code: DNR



Washington 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text 988 – free, confidential, multilingual, 24/7.

Crisis Text Line

Text HOME to 741741 – 24/7 & Nationwide

DNR Employee Well-Being Site

dnr.wa.gov/wellbeing

Need Support? Contact the CISM Team

You may reach out at any time or contact a CISM Team Member for support – even without a formal response.



Email: DNRDLCISM@dnr.wa.gov



Phone: 360-902-1300

Ask for WFMD Duty Officer

This document is intended as a general resource for DNR staff. For full program details, refer to **PO28-003 Critical Incident Stress Management Policy** and associated guidelines on DNR's Internal Policy SharePoint site.