



NWCG Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Desk Reference



Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) is a program aimed to promote resiliency to stress, support recovery after crisis, and enhance overall employee wellbeing. CISM services are offered by multiple organizations in the wildland fire community including the US Forest Service, Department of Interior Bureaus, and many state, municipal, and volunteer organizations.

Education

- Mental health and wellness education.
- Resiliency skill building
- Suicide awareness and prevention.
- Preparedness planning.

Critical Incident Response

Brief interventions after crisis, determined by need.

Response may include:

- Peer support.
- Mental health clinician.
- Education, support, resources, referral options.

Peer Support

- Diverse network of trained peer supporters from across the wildland fire service.
- Critical incident peer support.
- Peer support training and competency program.

Critical Incident Stress

Critical incidents are events that challenge or overwhelm our usual coping mechanisms by presenting unusually high levels of stress. Events such as death, serious accidents, serious injury, or close calls are often experienced as critical incidents. Reactions following critical incidents may include high levels of distress and a wide range of physical, emotional, and behavioral responses. Experiencing critical incident stress is common, but reactions and the way people express stress may vary.

We can provide care, empathy, and support to those affected by crisis by working to address their physical and emotional needs. After a critical incident, steps should be taken to meet immediate needs of:

- Physical safety
- Medical care
- Hygiene needs
- Healthy food
- Clean, cold drinking water
- Opportunities for good sleep and rest
- Connecting with loved ones and support networks

Critical Incident Response

Critical incident response aims to promote recovery and healthy coping after crisis through on-scene assignment of critical incident peer support teams or CISM Teams. CISM Teams typically include trained wildland fire peer supporters accompanied by a mental health clinician. Each team is assembled at the time of request to provide the best match of peers and clinician for the given situation. CISM Team services should be provided 48-72 hours after the incident and after immediate needs have been addressed.

CISM Teams draw from a range of strategies to support employees affected by crisis. Services offered by CISM Teams are provided on-scene and are brief in duration. After the response is over, members of the CISM Team may follow up with affected individuals to provide support and if deemed appropriate, encourage referral to professional care. Information about when and how to seek follow-up mental health care is provided during the response. CISM Teams do not provide long-term care and are not a replacement for professional mental health services.

Requesting Support

Each agency hosts regional and/or national CISM coordinators who are available for consultation regarding service requests and needs. Agency Administrators may request critical incident response through their Geographic Area Coordination Center.

Federal CISM Coordinators

USFS: [Identify CISM/CAP Manager by region](#)

USFS National CISM Coordinator:

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BLM: Patricia O'Brien, paobrien@blm.gov

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