



# SAFEWORK SA

## CRITICAL AND TRAUMATIC INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

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## DOCUMENT CONTROL SHEET

### Document Details

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### Contact Person

(for enquiries or amendments)

<b>Name</b>	██████████
<b>Position</b>	WHS Coordinator Corporate Services
<b>Telephone</b>	██████████
<b>Email Address</b>	████████████████████

### Endorsed

Executive Director  
SafeWork SA

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## PURPOSE

This Safe Work Practice (SWP) outlines the expected practice standards and the resources available when a worker is exposed to a critical or traumatic incident.

## SCOPE

This document applies to all SafeWork SA executive, managers and workers, whether permanent, temporary or contract.

## BACKGROUND

SafeWork SA is committed to providing a safe and healthy working environment and safe systems of work for all workers.

The Executive and Management of SafeWork SA acknowledge the effects and impact of the work environment on physical and psychological health, safety and welfare and recognise that all workers may be exposed to critical or traumatic incidents as part of their work.

A risk assessment will be conducted for the potential work-related stress factors when dealing with critical or traumatic incidents in the workplace.

For the purpose of this SWP, an incident can be defined into two categories

## CRITICAL INCIDENT

- Any event by which workers have been involved in serious injuries or fatality investigations
- Violent behaviour/assault or threat to life
- Natural disasters e.g. fires, floods and people-made emergencies e.g. chemical spills and industrial accidents
- Serious illness or death of worker, family or community members
- Redundancy, job loss
- Violent events in the community, world events
- Other incidents or emergencies that cause strong reaction

**Critical Incident Stress** – is the emotional stress that individuals may experience after being exposed to a specific incident that is perceived as traumatic

It is very common for stress related reactions to interfere with the worker's ability to function either immediately or at some time in the future. Sometimes these reactions may appear either during or immediately after the event and sometimes, after a few hours or days. In a few cases, weeks and months may pass before the reactions appear. The effects on individual workers can vary.

Common signs and symptoms of a stress reaction can include:

- Physical, e.g. trouble sleeping;
- Cognitive, e.g. poor concentration;
- Emotional, e.g. depression, agitation or shock;
- Behavioural, e.g. withdrawal, change of behaviour and/or
- Spiritual, e.g. questioning of basic beliefs.

## TRAUMATIC INCIDENT ([Trauma fact sheet](#))

- abusive behaviour;
- revealing information or viewing an event that is disturbing;
- Accidents.

**Traumatic Incident Stress** - is the emotional stress that individuals may experience after a traumatic incident that may involve exposure to catastrophic events, severely injured children or adults, dead bodies or body parts, or a loss of colleagues.

## PROCEDURES - POST INCIDENT RESPONSE

### Critical Incident

**In the event of a SafeWork SA staff member being involved with a Critical Incident, the following actions will be taken:**

Following an incident deemed as 'critical', if the worker indicates that they are suffering from critical incident stress, or in the manager's opinion the worker may be at risk of suffering from critical incident stress, the initial response to the worker will involve:

- Attending to their basic needs and their comfort.
- Provide an appropriate level of confidentiality.

The following approach by managers is generally suggested:

- Make necessary arrangements in respect of the worker's immediate work responsibilities. E.g. postpone appointments, meetings etc. with a focus on tasks requiring decision making.
  - Create a supportive and empathetic environment
1. The relevant manager **will immediately notify** the [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#) by phone/email with the details of the incident. The EAP will then contact the Team Manager obtaining name(s) of staff exposed and provide the initial necessary support needed.  
**Phone ( [REDACTED] ) (24hr)**
  2. The Manager will call the EAP and advise them that a Critical Incident has occurred and that a planned response is required. Details of the circumstances of the incident will be provided to the EAP including contact names and numbers of the worker(s) involved. (The Manager can expect that a psychologist/social worker will contact them within a maximum of two hours).
  3. The Manager will advise the worker that the EAP psychologist/social worker will make telephone contact with them as appropriate. The EAP can send consultants to the site to speak with the SafeWork SA workers. *They also conduct a 24hour, one week, 2 week and 4 week follow up unless informed otherwise.*
  4. The staff member's Manager will record the details of the incident on HIRM.
  5. Following an incident and once the manager has completed the above 1-4, the Manager will maintain open communication with the worker and monitor the wellbeing of the worker in regards to expected or usual performance and ensure the worker is not showing signs of distress.

### Traumatic Incident

**In the event of a staff member being exposed to a Traumatic Incident, the following actions will be taken:**

If the worker indicates that they have experienced a traumatic incident, or in the manager's opinion a worker may have been exposed to a traumatic incident, the initial response to the worker will involve:

- The worker will be contacted by his/her Manager to determine the exact circumstances of the incident.
- The Manager will contact the SafeWork SA EAP.  
**Phone ( [REDACTED] ) (24hr)**

The Manager will call the EAP and advise them that a Traumatic Incident has occurred and that that a planned response is required. Details of the circumstances of the incident will be provided to the EAP including contact names and numbers of the worker(s) involved. The Manager can expect that a psychologist/social worker will contact them within a maximum of two hours.

The Manager will advise the worker that the EAP psychologist will make telephone contact with them according to the above procedures.

The staff member's Manager will record the details of the incident on HIRM.

Following an incident the Manager will maintain open communication with the worker to ensure they are not showing signs of distress. If symptoms of distress are noted as per "common signs and symptoms of a stress reaction" (found on page 3) the Manager will notify the EAP with the relevant information.

### **Response by Managers (remember, the EAP program is also available for you!)**

During the investigation process, grieving family members of fatality (and other serious injury) victims are to be encouraged to access the [Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement](#) and the [National Health Services Directory](#) professional counsellors and information before, during and after interview process (Victim Liaison SOP SAFE/08/0805). This will ensure the health and wellbeing of all people involved is considered. Inspectors will also have access to SA Health brochures on wellness and grief support (available from the Corporate Services) to present to the witnesses and/or next of kin with the above information.

Some situations can be highly charged so Inspectors may need to have an EAP support counsellor available for attendance at an inspector meeting with witnesses and/or next of kin.

To minimise the effects of critical or traumatic incidents appropriate and adequate support must be provided by the Managers and EAP.

It is important that SafeWork SA workers involved in or present during a critical or traumatic incident be offered post incident support and debriefing.

All workers need to be made aware of the role of critical incident follow-up, and any worker involved in a traumatic incident needs to be informed of the expectation that they receive appropriate support.

Consider the following and action where appropriate:

- Is the worker showing signs of agitation, lethargy, or lack of concentration? Is medical assessment required for physical or psychological injuries
- Is police involvement necessary?
- Is there someone at home if the worker were to leave the workplace? If not, can they call someone if needed? If no one at home and the person decides to leave work, the manager **must** call the worker before they leave the workplace that day. Consider if there is social support available at home?
- Should the SafeWork SA Peer Support program be accessed by the worker or the manager?
- Follow up discussion with worker(s) at least a month following the incident to provide further support as needed. For e.g., this could be discussed at the next 1:1 meeting.

### **Psychological Assessments and First Aid**

The EAP psychologist will make telephone contact with the worker(s) as appropriate following the reported incident.

A face-to-face appointment will be arranged if required. Where face-to-face consultation is required, it will include:

- an initial screening of the risk factors for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD – a clinically diagnosed condition which describes the after effects of trauma on an individual who has experienced or witnessed trauma);
- Mental Health First Aid
- Preliminary assessment of the worker's overall psychological well-being.

### **Workers – When to get help?**

Sometimes distressing events can be difficult to overcome and you may benefit from professional help. Don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it. You should consider seeking extra help if:

- you continue to experience distress two weeks after a traumatic event
- you feel distressed, frightened, irritable or on edge much of the time
- you are unable to carry out your normal routine at home, work etc.
- you experience flashbacks about an incident that triggers emotional distress.

Contact your Manager, Peer Support Network or EAP if you are experiencing any of the above.

### **Review Consultation and Follow Up**

Based on the initial consultation, the need for further treatment or intervention will be determined in consultation with the Manager and the EAP.

### **Communication with the Employer/Medical Professional**

The EAP will make contact with the Manager by phone to advise that contact with the employee has been made and appropriate feedback based on risk factors will be provided. Appropriate communication can occur with other treating professionals where risk factors dictate and in support of the best interests of the employee. Confidentiality factors will be managed by the psychologist/social worker from the EAP.

### **Notification**

The notification of critical incidents provides important information for SafeWork SA to develop adequate work health and safety policies for the future.

The Hazard & Incident Reporting Module (HIRM) is to be used to accurately record the details of the critical and traumatic incidents to ensure that all relevant information is collected. Managers should record the incident on HIRM as soon as reasonably practical. Workers will be advised to record details on the incident when they are fit to do so.

Critical and traumatic incidents recorded on HIRM will be examined for compliance with the SWP.

### **Training**

Managers and Team Leaders;

Managers and Team Leaders will receive the “Managing Mental Health in the Workplace: Building resilience and supporting workers with mental health concerns” – one day course.

Workers;

This document will be part of the SafeWork SA induction process for workers. Inspectors, Licensing and Authorisation Team and Help Centre workers will receive training in “Dealing with Aggressive and Difficult Clients” or similar training.

Peer Support Officers;

Peer Support Officers are fellow workers who are nominated by their colleagues. They offer assistance/support to colleagues in the workplace dealing with personal or work-related issues.

The essence and basic philosophy of a peer support program is that people who have completed a relevant training program assist fellow workers to cope with on-the-job problems. Peer Support Officers will be trained in the relevant training and a refresher half day course of similar contents to be scheduled every two (2) years.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Other related documents,

This SWP should be read in conjunction with:

- [Worker Security Policy](#).  
Provides workers with a safe system of work in the event they come into contact with aggressive or potentially violent clients whilst undertaking their duties.
- Victim Liaison SOP SAFE/08/0805  
Outlines the protocols SafeWork SA (SWSA) staff should follow when liaising with the work colleagues and next of kin of victims of an accident or event that has occurred at a workplace. Peer Support Network  
Peer Support Officers are fellow workers who are nominated by their colleagues. They offer assistance/support to colleagues in the workplace dealing with personal or work-related issues.
- [Beyond Blue](#)  
Beyond blue is working to reduce the impact of depression and anxiety in the community by raising awareness and understanding, empowering people to seek help, and supporting recovery, management and resilience. This includes downloadable workplace resources and an online training module that managers and employees can undertake to increase their awareness of mental health issues.
- [SafeWork SA Work-Related Death](#) information booklet Information for people following a fatality
- [Recovery - Fact Sheets & Booklets](#)  
The information is for people affected by trauma, their families and friends.  
You can download or order the Fact Sheets and Booklets, or try out the PTSD Coach Australia App for free.
- [Posttraumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\) Guidelines](#)  
The Australian Guidelines for the Treatment of Acute Stress Disorder and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder provide information about the most effective treatments for PTSD.
- [Australian Guidelines for the Treatment of Acute Stress Disorder & Posttraumatic Stress Disorder](#)  
The Guidelines aim to support high quality treatment of people with PTSD by providing a framework of best practice around which to structure treatment.

## Review

This procedure will be reviewed two (3) years after endorsement, however, Managers and workers involved in its implementation should report any deficiencies as soon as possible.