

Colorado Crisis Support Network Guidelines For Response to Protracted Events



Crisis Support Teams were developed to provide psychological support to emergency responders and healthcare workers during and following disaster response and after specific critical incidents that affect individual response groups. Large scale, protracted events, such as wildfires, pose unique challenges to decisions regarding the necessity, type, and timing of interventions. Our primary goal must always be to “do no harm.”

Wildfires provide several scenarios and challenges: the routine firefighting response; potential loss of life of responders such as firefighters and pilots; potential loss of life of civilians; and potential loss of property of responders. While desiring to be of assistance, the Colorado Crisis Support Network teams are comprised of volunteers and response will be dictated by several factors including: the number of firefighter or other team members who may be responding to the fire; the location of the requested response, the timing of the requested response, the length of time of the requested response, and the nature of the services requested.

In the “typical” critical incident, Crisis Support Teams may be available on-scene for support and provide defusings and debriefings after the responders have completed their tour of duty on the incident. Certain major disasters necessitate that responders return to the disaster site for days, weeks, or perhaps months. Major disasters also challenge Crisis Response Teams to provide the most appropriate type of intervention given the circumstances.

The Colorado Crisis Support Network has discussed a request for a Crisis Support Team to remain on standby at the site of a wildfire. The consensus of the Network representatives was that this type of response is not feasible, given the length and nature of the required response. In this circumstance, the wildland firefighting response would be considered similar to the typical structure fire, which does not activate a Crisis Support Team in the absence of a confounding or secondary critical incident.

Secondary critical incidents would include:

- ◆ Death of a responder(s)
- ◆ Death of a civilian
- ◆ Loss of property of responders

In these circumstances, activation of a Crisis Support Team should be considered. The type of intervention will depend on the following:

- ◆ The nature of the incident
- ◆ The number of affected responders
- ◆ The deployment assignment of the affected individuals

Wildland firefighting personnel frequently move from assignment to assignment immediately following an incident and, therefore, may not have adequate decompression time following a debriefing. The team must always give consideration to whether a seven phase debriefing is appropriate in the circumstances where personnel must return to an intense response mode. Each circumstance and request for service must be carefully assessed for the appropriate intervention.

The following guidelines are recommended:

1. Requests for service should be made directly to the Crisis Support Team that is in closest geographic proximity to the site/scene. The Colorado Crisis Support Network does not have a centralized dispatch mechanism.
2. Each Colorado Crisis Support Team must have a fail-safe contact point/dispatch method to insure rapid response to requests.
3. In contrast to the typical request for crisis support services, the individual making the request may have little information on the intervention needed, number of personnel, and other logistical information. It is imperative that the Crisis Support Team dispatcher assess the following:
 - a. What was the nature of the precipitating event?
 - b. What responses or observations precipitated the call for assistance?
 - c. How many personnel were affected?
 - d. How many personnel will be available to attend the intervention?
 - e. Who is the direct supervisor and how may he or she be contacted?
 - f. What are the names and call back numbers of the contact individual(s): office, pager, and cell phone?
 - g. Is reimbursement available for team expenses: mileage (or airfare), meals, and lodging (if necessary)?
4. Confusion ultimately results when more than one team member fields calls for requests for services. It is not uncommon for two different team members to receive calls from different individuals in a requesting agency or agencies for the same work group. It is important that all calls are referred to the identified team dispatcher to avoid duplication of efforts. The team dispatcher may request assistance from other team members as needed.
5. In some cases, education may be the most appropriate intervention if responders do not have time to decompress. It could prove harmful to ask/promote individuals to remove defense mechanisms.
6. In the circumstances when responders do not have the ability to decompress, a crisis management briefing or a defusing or three-phase intervention may be most appropriate. It is recommended that the team approach the defusing as a three-phase model, but be prepared to facilitate a five or seven phase intervention, and to staff the intervention accordingly.
7. Provide follow-up contact information for your team to all responders in the intervention.
8. Crisis Support Teams may receive requests to provide services to the general public and/or victim groups. In general, these requests should be

- referred to the American Red Cross Disaster Response teams or the local mental health center. Victims have on-going needs which Crisis Support Teams are not prepared to provide. Distribution of services to appropriate resources is important.
9. Crisis Support Teams may be offered reimbursement for services. The Colorado Crisis Support Network representatives have agreed on a standard process ***IF*** reimbursement is offered and accepted.
 - a. The standard accepted fee is \$25 per team member per hour
 - b. The fees will be paid to the Crisis Support Team, not individual members
 - c. The Crisis Support Team may decide on appropriate use/distribution of funds.
 10. Requesting agencies can be referred to the website for team contact numbers, brochures, handouts, and other materials. To access the website, go to www.healthONEms.com and click on crisis support. Select Colorado Crisis Support Network. Additional information may be downloaded from the Mayflower Crisis Support Team section on the Crisis Support page. A link to the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation is also available.
 11. During protracted events, centralized communication with a designated Colorado Crisis Support Network member is beneficial. In addition to the routine reporting, at least one individual should remain abreast of the current activity of the Network teams and the “larger picture.” This individual can be any Network representative or the Network Coordinator. Email is an effective mechanism to distribute summary information to all member teams in an efficient manner.

RELATIVE INTENSITY OF INTERVENTIONS

