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# LESSON LEARNED

## Law Enforcement: Guidelines for Assigning Personnel after Mass Casualty Incidents

### SUMMARY

Police departments should insure that their guidelines for the reassignment of personnel after a critical incident include exposure to a mass casualty incident (MCI). Law enforcement personnel who cannot be placed on leave following a MCI should be assigned duties away from the incident site.

### DESCRIPTION

The fire that destroyed the Station Club in Warwick, Rhode Island on February 20, 2003, resulted in 100 deaths and more than 200 injuries. Many West Warwick Police Department (WWPD) personnel played a major role in the extremely traumatic rescue operations during the fire. This work proved to be physically and emotionally draining for the officers involved.

The WWPD provided round-the-clock security at the incident site for nearly five months after the fire. Many WWPD officers remained assigned to the incident scene as part of the ongoing law enforcement operations and crime scene investigation. In some cases, members involved in rescue operations or otherwise affected by the fire may have been assigned to the incident site before receiving counseling. Most police departments have strict guidelines regarding the reassignment of officers after involvement in a critical incident such as a shooting. However, these guidelines often do not include MCIs such as the Station Club fire.

Police departments should broaden their assignment guidelines to include exposure to MCIs. The *Rhode Island Station Club After-Action Report* recommends placing law enforcement personnel who participated in traumatic rescue operations on leave, if possible, or else assigning them duties away from the incident scene.

### CITATION

Titan Systems Corporation. *Rhode Island: The Station Club Fire After-Action Report: State, Local, and Federal Government and the Private Sector*. 13 Jul 2004.  
[https://www.llis.dhs.gov/member/secure/detail.cfm?content\\_id=10806](https://www.llis.dhs.gov/member/secure/detail.cfm?content_id=10806)

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