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Critical Incident Stress Management: Attendance of Command Officials at Debriefings

SUMMARY

Emergency response agencies often require or recommend that their personnel attend a Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) debriefing session following a major incident. Command officials should consider not attending the entire debriefing session so that their personnel feel comfortable discussing their concerns and frustrations about the incident.

DESCRIPTION

The Rhode Island CISM Team, with assistance from additional Massachusetts CISM teams, conducted twenty-nine debriefing sessions during the three weeks following the Rhode Island Night Club Fire in West Warwick, Rhode Island in spring 2003. Both department leaders and frontline emergency response personnel attended the debriefings. However, many senior department members left the session near the end so that frontline personnel could discuss the incident without intimidation or fear of repercussions. The frontline personnel were then free to speak more candidly about the incident as they concluded the debriefing session. The senior department members concluded their session with another member of the CISM team in a separate room.

It is essential that personnel involved in a major incident have a forum in which they feel comfortable discussing the incident. Emergency response agencies that require or recommend attendance in CISM debriefings following a major incident should consider encouraging command staff to conclude their debriefings in a separate session.

CITATION

- Titan Systems Corporation. *Rhode Island: The Station Club Fire After-Action Report: State, Local, and Federal Government and the Private Sector*. July 2004. ([LLIS.gov ID# 10806](#))

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