

# ISLE OF MAN GOVERNMENT

## SUPPORTING STAFF THROUGH TRAUMA

### POLICY AND WORKING GUIDELINES FOR ALL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

#### The Policy

The Isle of Man Government is committed to ensuring the provision of a safe environment for all its employees. It undertakes to support the effective anticipation of trauma and its aftermath and to consider how the effects can be mitigated for individuals and groups. This policy covers incidents occurring both at work and in staff's personal lives and aims to maintain support for a return to work and to enable a return to 'normality' as soon as possible.

#### The Aims

This policy and working guidelines are intended to:-

- Recognise what constitutes a traumatic event and the importance of doing so
- Inform about Post Traumatic Stress - and its impact on individuals in the organisation
- Identify steps to be taken before, during and after the event of a traumatic incident
- Inform of sources of support available to reduce the adverse effects
- Support individuals on their return to work after absence caused by trauma

#### Introduction

The Isle of Man Government through its Emergency Plans has in place policies and procedures to deal with major emergencies or incidents. In addition to this Departments, Boards and Offices have Business Continuity Plans to encompass their respective operations. The Major Incident Support Team - a group comprising representatives from involved government departments and representatives from the private, religious and voluntary sectors and headed by Social Services - is in place to support the Home Affairs Emergency Planning and Civil Defence teams.

This policy and working guidelines is appropriate for major incidents but also deals with incidents which are not covered by those plans - incidents which affect individuals or small groups of people both at work and in their personal lives, those within the organisation who may be remote from a scene of trauma but who play a crucial part in its handling and others who may not immediately be considered at risk.

Government has a moral and statutory responsibility to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all employees. The provisions of this policy and working guidelines are based upon current expert opinion, safe practice and accountability covering organisational response to traumatic events.

Current research has demonstrated that good management care plays a vital role in the prevention, support and improvement of traumatic stress symptoms. Manager and colleague support is an essential element in the effective recovery of individuals and the provision of a supportive environment is the responsibility of line managers and senior managers who have a key role in ensuring staff are supported. It is also recognised how important it is for individuals to be pro-active in the management of their own health issues including stress caused by trauma.

Current research also suggests people will differ widely in their reactions to trauma and how they respond to any supporting procedures offered. However an awareness of the following points is important:-

- Individuals have a responsibility in the first instance for their own health and welfare and to be aware of this policy and guidelines.
- Managers have a responsibility to their work-force to raise awareness of the support that is available for individuals who have experienced a traumatic incident at work or in their personal life.

Managers will need to evaluate the necessity for certain measures including risk assessment, training and education in trauma related stress and its effects and rehearsal of traumatic incident procedures for their particular work area.

## **Training**

Training can be provided to promote an understanding of traumatic stress, its impact and how to cope with it. (See support systems). Each Department, Board or Office must have their own response to trauma which adheres to this government policy.

## **Communication**

Good clear lines of communication during and after an incident are very important and need to be established and tested in preparation for a critical or traumatic incident.

## **Defined practices**

Clearly defined practices for managing incidents where-ever possible, clear guidance on dealing with the immediate aftermath of an incident and longer term support for employees are vital. These approaches, adapted to differing organisational needs, will minimise the potential harm of Post Traumatic Stress and therefore lessen any adverse affect on individuals and the organisation as a whole.

## **What is a traumatic event**

Any occurrence which causes **emotional shock** to one or more individuals can be classed as traumatic. It is important that this is recognised at an early stage so that help and support can be given by management and colleagues and sought from the appropriate sources as required. Support from line managers and above for employees affected is crucial and the provision of a supportive environment will assist with the recovery of anyone suffering the effects of witnessing or being involved in trauma.

## **What is Post Traumatic Stress**

Post Traumatic Stress is a **normal reaction** to an event outside the range of normal human experience. The following are examples of incidents which may lead to Post Traumatic Stress:-

- Threat of or serious injury or death involving close friends/family/colleagues
- Deaths of children
- Serious abuse/injury to children
- Hostage incidents
- Life threatening risks

- Suicide
- Murder
- Accident leading to or involving fatalities or serious injury
- Witnessing any of the above
- Any incident involving unusual circumstances that produces a high level of emotion. This can also occur where there is prolonged involvement associated with death, for example if someone has witnessed protracted suffering possible in the terminally ill or where lengthy procedures such as a trial, hearing or enquiry are necessary.

### **The effects of Post Traumatic Stress**

As stated before this is a **normal reaction to an extreme event**. Symptoms may include:-

- Anxiety
- Sleep problems and exhaustion
- Irritability
- Increased emotional state – crying
- Withdrawal from relationships and/or sexual difficulties
- Loss of appetite
- Flash-backs, intrusive thoughts and images of the incident
- Avoidance of place incident happened, or thought or discussion regarding incident
- Depression
- Lack of motivation
- Fear/shame/guilt/anger/bitterness
- Physical problems - skin rashes, vomiting, palpitations, sweats
- Lack of concentration
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs.

These symptoms are normal and may last 2 - 3 months after the event. The symptoms that may be experienced can be severe enough to affect people's day to day lives and their ability to work. However, if they are persistent or causing distress help and support can be sought at any time from the sources listed at the end of this document.

### **Working Guidelines**

These procedures are for incidents involving individuals or small groups of people who may be at risk through trauma occurring at work or in an individual's personal life.

Any traumatic incident happening at work will be reported to the manager by those involved or witnessing the incident. The manager will seek the necessary help of emergency and medical teams,

record the incident, and maintain an awareness of the possible need for intervention to support those involved, those witnessing the incident and support for him or herself. (See Support Systems)

For major public incidents involving many casualties the Home-Affairs Emergency Planning and Civil Defence Team will be informed and the Major Incident Team headed by Social Services will co-ordinate procedures. However in the event of a major incident the support outlined below is also appropriate.

The government is the major employer on the Isle of Man and as such it is inevitable that a higher proportion of the emergency, medical and specialist service staff called on to deal with a traumatic event will know some of those involved. As this is likely to put even greater pressure on the existing members of the public services consideration must be given to 'drafting- in' qualified help and support for affected organisations. (See Support Systems)

### **Before an incident at work**

During the operational planning stage plans must be made (if they are not already in existence) to cater for the possibility of a traumatic incident and direct lines of communication established. Many Departments, Boards and Offices will have an Emergency Plan or Business Continuity Plan which, if not already providing for trauma support, should be amended to do so.

### **Risk Assessment**

Risk assessment is a legal requirement in the Isle of Man from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2004 and the Health and Safety at Work Act, as applied to the Island, requires managers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its employees, so far as reasonably practicable and suitable and sufficient risk assessments demonstrate that this has been done.

It is important to identify individuals and groups within an area of operation where the risk of traumatic incident is high. This is already done in many Departments, Boards and Offices. Risk assessment can enable prioritisation of resources and the implementation of arrangements to be made to significantly reduce the likelihood of a person becoming traumatised. Further information about risk assessment can be obtained from Departmental Health and Safety Officers or the Principle Health and Safety Advisor in the Personnel Office.

Risk assessment can also be used as a part of the return to work process following a traumatic incident and consideration can be given to providing additional support or adjusting the individuals working arrangements for a period of time. Further guidance on this is outlined later in the document.

### **Training**

There are a number of responses to traumatic incidents but one immediate response might be 'Defusing'. This is an informal process carried out by a trained supervisor, manager or other appropriate person after an incident. They are ideally placed in the first instance to:-

- Be aware of such incidents
- Be able to respond promptly
- Be aware of other influencing factors - recent stressful events at home or work
- Be able to monitor how individuals appear to be responding
- Be able to request professional support at an early stage.
- Be aware of other formal processes such as the Police Force ' Post Incident Management' procedure and other operational issues.

Individual organisations must decide who will receive such training.

The Major Incident Support Team, the Staff Welfare Service and the Department of Home Affairs Staff Welfare Officer have trained officers who can provide Trauma or Critical Incident Debriefing. This is a more formal response that seeks to normalize the affects of trauma and is usually carried out 36 to 72 hours after the incident. (See Support Systems)

### **During an incident at work**

Support from line managers for employees affected at this time is crucial. Support for the line managers is also essential and it is important that communication with a more senior manager is kept open to assist this process.

It is the line manager's responsibility to identify a traumatic incident - recognised as an occurrence which causes trauma to one or more individuals - and request emergency services or medical attention as appropriate. Support will also be sought as appropriate from:-

- Own Personnel/HR offices
- The Staff Welfare Services
- Mental Health teams
- Occupational Health teams (where available)
- Contracted private providers
- Major Incident Support Team

Staff directly and indirectly involved will be advised of the support systems available to them as soon as is reasonably practical by their manager or suitably trained persons from the above list.

If the incident is prolonged consideration should also be given to the provision of rest breaks, food and drink and also facilitating communication with family. From the research gathered at this time these points have been found to be invaluable to those caught up in traumatic situations.

All other staff within the immediate Department will subsequently be informed about support available as soon as is practical.

Managers and individuals will maintain an awareness of and possible need for support for others involved on the periphery and take the necessary supporting action i.e.:-

- those whose relatives were involved
- those who took the first telephone calls regarding the incident
- those typing reports of the incident
- those for whom there may be other influencing factors – recent stressful events at home and work.
- those whose work-load is increased because of the incident for example covering for absent colleagues

Managers will also maintain an awareness of their own needs for support and senior managers must be aware of the possible needs of their staff.

### **Following an incident at work**

Paper recording – the appropriate documentation must be completed by line managers to record the incident and the action taken for the purposes of audit, to ensure that all has been done for the individuals concerned and to minimise the possibility of litigation.

Maintaining contact with individuals and groups affected after an incident is part of the managerial role and has been identified as one of the beneficial factors that can influence how employees cope in the weeks to follow. Acknowledging that there may be a **continued impact** in the work place for some individuals and discussing how best to manage these with those involved may well help alleviate long term effects.

Consideration of the following will be helpful:-

- Individuals will consider their own needs and stress levels
- Managers will be aware of stress levels of all staff
- Frequent breaks in work should be taken and encouraged
- Time will be allowed for informal de-briefing (off-loading) initially
- If possible extra days off on compassionate grounds should be granted
- Where appropriate formal de-briefing through the recognised trained providers will be organised
- All staff will be reminded of the support available
- Consideration must also be given to those who may have covered wider and more varied duties under pressure whilst other staff members have been off sick or on other duties because of the incident.
- Consideration may be given to drafting in further trained staff whilst the organisation recovers

**Staff who have been absent** from work because of a traumatic incident will be fully supported on their return to work and issues such as:-

- Where they will work
- Who they will work with
- If a gradual return is appropriate
- What support will be available on their return to work
- What other changes need to be addressed as a temporary or permanent measure, will be discussed and facilitated where-ever possible.

A risk assessment may be appropriate in the above circumstances.

In incidents such as the **death of a work colleague** consideration should be given to inviting the Government Staff Welfare Service or another provider to visit the work place to let people know of the different types of support available.

For those who may have to give evidence at a hearing, trial, Inquest or enquiry it may be appropriate for consideration to be given to time off on compassionate grounds or organise shifts or duties around the event for the individuals concerned.

An awareness of the first and subsequent anniversaries of a particular traumatic event is important and individuals and line managers may wish to give consideration to how this will be managed.

Following a traumatic incident at work Departments must conduct a full review of procedures and events within two to three months with the emphasis on improvement of the handling of the situation bearing in mind that no two incidents will be alike and that lessons will always be learned.

### **Following an incident outside of work**

There may be occasions when traumatic incidents affect an individual's personal life and the way in which they are supported by managers and colleagues can significantly assist their recovery and ability to work. In the event of such an incident being reported the support systems below are also appropriate. A similar level of support should be offered as that defined in **Following an incident at work**.

### **Support Systems**

The support systems outlined below are applicable where a traumatic incident happens either at or outside of work. Support and information can be requested by individuals or managers.

- Government Staff Welfare Service – St Georges Court, Upper Church Street, Douglas. Tel - 687027
- Department of Home Affairs Welfare Service – Tel - 685182 or 486253
- DHSS Central Referral Team – Trauma Support – Tel -642860
- DHSS Occupational Health Services - Nobles Hospital, Tel - 642150 ( for DHSS staff and those Public Service bodies with the appropriate contracts with DHSS Occupational Health)
- Work-well Occupational Health Service – Civil Service Staff (Management referrals only)Tel - 0151 2241400
- Major Incident Support Team - Emergency Response Team Leader– Mike Williamson – Social Services Tel - 656061
- Critical Incident Debriefing Co-ordinator (Major Incident Support Team) – Steve Hobbs Tel – 642878
- Home Affairs Emergency Planning and Civil Defence – Tel - 694300
- GP referral to DHSS run confidential counselling service – Tele 642540
- Own GP
- Private counsellors - Telephone numbers in phone directory
- Self Help - Leaflets and literature available from libraries, GPs surgeries and book shops, the Government Staff Welfare Services and the Internet. Useful web links:- [www.uktrauma.org.uk](http://www.uktrauma.org.uk) and [www.trauma-pages.com](http://www.trauma-pages.com) also [www.nittinghamshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/trauma](http://www.nittinghamshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/trauma) .

This policy and working guidelines will be reviewed by the Staff Welfare Service each December.

## References

Whilst formulating this policy and guidelines information from the following sources, publications, documents and research briefs have been considered:-

Health and Safety at work Act 1974 as applied to the Isle of Man

Rose S, Bisson J, Wessley S, Psychological debriefing for preventing post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Cochrane Review) In the Cochrane Library Issue1 2003 Oxford date software

The Pros and Cons of Stress Debriefing – Jane’s Law Enforcement – [www.janes.com](http://www.janes.com)

An article from International Police Review 3 Dec 1998.

HSE Press Release E210:00 – 6 November 2000 - <http://hse.gov.uk/press/e00210.htm>

Frank Parkinson BA Dip Th - Consultant and Trainer on Counselling and Trauma - [fwparkinson@hotmail.com](mailto:fwparkinson@hotmail.com)

Frank Parkinson - ‘Coping with Post-Trauma Stress’ Sheldon Press – 2000

Society for Human Resource Management – Critical Incident Response Planning

Information re the change-over from “Critical Incident De-briefing” to “Post Trauma Support” from Brian Smith – Chief Welfare Officer, Ministry of Defence, Occupational Welfare Service, Room 578, St Giles Court, 1-13 St Giles High Street, London.

Policy on the provision of Post Incident Psychological Debriefing – Gary Reynolds Isle of Man Government DHSS, Mental Health Service, Mental Health Resource Centre, Strang, Isle of Man.

Information from Research by Simon Wessely, professor of psychological medicine, Kings College, London.

Isle of Man Government, DHSS Mental Health Services, Adult Mental Health, Counselling Service - Trauma After Care Policy.

Health and Safety Executive (1998) “From Accidents to Assaults. How organisational responses to traumatic incidents can prevent post traumatic stress disorder in the workplace” The Institute for employment studies 195/1988.

Hetherington,A. (1994) “Human resource management in times of stress”

Thames Valley Police Human Resources Policy Handbook – Stress Management Policy Sections 5 and 6.

Suzanna Rose – ‘Coping with Traumatic Experiences’ Royal Holloway University of London, Egham, Surrey. 07771 867824



Hampshire County Council – Social Services Dept. Major Incident Support Team Document 'Welfare of Major Incident Support Team Workers'.

Geoff Mitchell – www.ICISF – International Critical Incident Stress Foundation.

Greater Manchester County Fire Service

Home Office Emergency Planning College 'Supporting your Staff Through a Critical Incident' Course.

## **Consultation**

The following people have been consulted or given feedback in the formulation of this policy and working guidelines:-

Mike Ball – Director of Leisure

Martin Blackburn – Emergency Planning and Civil Defence Officer

John Cashin – Fire Officer

Eileen Dutton – DHA Welfare Officer

Government Officers Association

Pat Heggs – Mental Health Promotion

Dr Jefferson –Consultant- Occupational Health

Alan Jones – Chairman – Isle of Man Police Federation and Health and Safety Advisor

Voirrey Kewley – RCN Lead Steward

Andrew Lang – Manager-Community Mental Health Team Northern Manager

Caron Palmer - Principal Health and Safety Advisor

Sue Plant – Manager- Occupational Health

Gary Reynolds – Clinical Governance and Standards Officer

Sue Strang – Discrimination/Equality Officer

John Sullivan – Manager-DOT Engineering Works (now retired)