

CIWS Information for Operational Crews

Many of you may have heard of the Critical Incident Wellbeing Sessions (CIWS) being offered to crews following operational incidents. You may have a good awareness of what these sessions are and their purpose, or you may only have seen the post-incident question relating to CIWS on the Mobile Data Terminal (MDT). This information sheet is to give all operational crews understanding of what CIWS is, what it can do for crews, and how to access it.

Background

It has long been recognised that members of professions such as the military and emergency services are exposed to traumatic incidents and instances of human suffering which can have a detrimental effect on those workers. In the past, the support that was offered within these occupations was basic at best and in some circumstances non-existent. In present times, mental health is much more in the forefront of people's minds and the support available is varied, widespread and easily accessible to all.

Research has shown that early intervention following traumatic events can prevent the onset of mental health issues in the future and the simple act of talking through your experiences can help with making sense of what has been experienced and felt.

It was also noted that it isn't necessarily one single, large scale incident that can have a detrimental effect on people. It may be a personal connection that a person feels to an incident or attending a number of serious incidents in a short space of time. There is no 'one size fits all' marker for when people may be affected by traumatic incidents.

The British Red Cross has done a huge amount of work in this field, both in research and providing support for a variety of teams, and in September 2019 a group of volunteers from SYFR undertook training provided by the British Red Cross and CIWS was formed. These volunteers are staff from SYFR from across all departments, both operational and support staff.

What is CIWS?

First and foremost, CIWS is not counselling or therapy and is not designed to replace such interventions.

The nature of Fire & Rescue work means that crews are exposed to 'critical incidents'. These are situations, or a series of situations, where individuals can experience unusually strong feelings or reactions to events that they are faced with. These reactions and feelings can lead to a disrupted work or home life. CIWS is designed to assist in lessening the impact and reducing the likelihood of long term detriment through a consistent, coordinated and effective approach.

What support is required will vary greatly depending on what the nature of the incident is, and indeed the individual or crew involved, and as such the types and levels of support available are varied. Not all levels or types of support will be required for all critical incidents and ultimately it will often be the Incident Commander and Line Managers who will decide on the support required depending on the incident and the individuals. Please remember that individuals are able to request support also.

Levels of Support available

Post Incident Wellbeing Defusing Session – Basically, a ‘Fire Brew’ back on station. This is to be taken by the Watch/Line Manager before the end of the shift that the incident took place in, involving everyone who took part in the incident, in an informal setting. This is an opportunity for all involved to have the opportunity to openly discuss the incident from a wellbeing perspective and to highlight and provide information on initial support that is available. If there are any concerns about any individuals at this time further support can be found through Occupational Health or the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) – see *below for information*.

Critical Incident Wellbeing Session (CIWS) – this is a structured, confidential discussion facilitated by two trained peer CIW Supporters and takes place from approximately 72 hours to 2 weeks after the incident. Crews involved will be ‘off the run’ for the duration of the session to avoid interruptions. This session is an opportunity for the crews to discuss the incident in a safe, supported and open forum where they will also be made aware of the support available to them. The session is guided by the CIW Supporters to ensure that all involved have the chance to talk through the incident. By talking through the incident, those involved may make sense of their experiences and feelings. It is not counselling, psychotherapy or an operational debrief.

Procedure for requesting CIWS

CIWS should be instigated by the Incident Commander following incidents involving:

- Serious injury or death of a colleague
- Death of a child
- Incidents involving traumatic injuries or death
- Multiple casualties/fatalities
- Major disaster or incident
- An incident which contains high levels of violence or aggression towards staff

Please note this list is not prescriptive - CIWS can be requested should the Incident Commander / Watch / Line Manager deem it necessary following any particular incident or series of incidents impacting one crew / team. If in any doubt please contact either Phil Hargreaves (Health & Wellbeing Manager) or any of the CIWS volunteers for further advice.

How are CIWS instigated?

- **Incident Commanders*** liaise with the Line Manager / Watch Manager and contact the CIWS Supporter team via ciws@syfire.gov.uk if a CIWS needs to be instigated.

Our CIW Supporters will then get in touch with Line / Watch Managers to agree a suitable venue and time for the CIWS to be delivered.



- Complete the 'hot debrief' question-set within the MDTs answering 'yes' to 'is this a critical wellbeing incident?' This will send an automatic notification to the CIWS team.
 - We still want to encourage Incident Commanders to also submit a request independent of the MDT.

*: CIWSs can also be requested by Line Managers, Watch Managers, staff involved in the incident, OH, HR, Health and Safety or CIW Supporters. To do so this request can be made directly to ciws@syfire.gov.uk

If any questions arise or further information on CIWS is needed then this can be discussed directly with any of the volunteers and a list can be found at the end of this document.

More information

For further information on all things CIW, please feel free to contact one of our CIW Supporters or contact Phil Hargreaves, Health & Wellbeing Manager.

You could always request a **Zoom session** for your crew, watch or team with a couple of our CIW Supporters where you can find out more about CIWS and ask any questions you may have. To do this please contact as above or email ciws@syfire.gov.uk adding 'CIWS Zoom request' in the email subject.

There is also a policy (Critical Incident Wellbeing Policy) which can be found at: <https://syfrwellbeing.co.uk/ciws/> where further information on all of the above can be found.

List of CIWS Volunteers

Volunteer Name	Site
WM Matt Winslow	Lowedges
Russell Parramore	CHQ (RPaC)
Emma Wright	CHQ (Corporate Communications)
SM Paul Buttery	Birley
CM Mark Wild	Lowedges
FF Liz Eardley	Aston Park
FF Alex Reid	Rotherham
Kirstie Bennett	Fire Community Safety
WM Kirsty Wright	Birley
WM Jim Bright	Lowedges
FF Emma Anthony	Birley
FF Andy Marshall	Parkway
FF Raj Gogna	Rotherham
WM Jade Styan	Cudworth

Other support Available

- For information, videos, self-help programmes, interactive tools and resources to help with life's challenges check out the **NEW SYFR Health & Wellbeing site:** <https://syfrwellbeing.co.uk/>



- Please also remember that the SYFR **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)** can provide advice 24/7/365 on lots of life's challenges. You can contact our EAP experts on the **FREE and CONFIDENTIAL HELPLINE on 0800 030 5182**. Or visit the EAP portal www.healthassuredeap.com.

The EAP app can also be downloaded via the Apple App Store or Google Play by searching 'health e-hub'. Login details for the portal and app (username: SYFR, password: EAP).

- The Occupational Health team is also here to advise. You can contact them on extension: 2273, or by emailing occhealthadmin@syfire.gov.uk

Take care

SYFR, Critical Incident Wellbeing Supporters

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