In the Event of a Critical Incident at Work

Know that while you may not have been trained in the specific interventions that support resilience and return to productivity after a critical incident or in the wake of a stressful event, your leadership is generally what is most important at this time.

The goal of this Quick Guide is to provide additional suggestions on immediate steps to take when responding to a critical or stressful event in the workplace.

First Steps

- **Stay calm – take deep breaths.** As a human being, you too, will have a stress response. That is a normal physiological reaction designed to energize us to meet the challenge. Too much or too strong a stress response, however, may lead to feelings of distress and panic. Breathing deeply will help manage your stress response and remain productive.

- **Refer to any contingency plan.** A plan for this kind of incident may already have been implemented at your workplace. If so, refer to it and the steps you are to take.

- **First priority is safety.** Move yourself and your employees to a safe environment to secure from any potential or further harm.

- **Touch base with all employees.** The incident may have scattered employees; some may have gone home or were absent. By connecting to them you are sending a powerful message that their workplace cares for them.

- **Attend to the immediate, physical needs of employees.** Provide them with food and water, warmth, dry clothes or blankets as needed. Arrange for employees to call family or friends. Their ability to connect with loved ones will activate their resilience.

- **If there is physical damage to your facility, arrange for a safe environment** where employees can gather and support each other. Have resources and information available. Handouts from PAS are available (www.paseap.com) which explain signs and symptoms of critical incident stress and how to manage it. If possible, print out copies ahead of time so they are available when needed.

- **Establish a communication plan.** Employees turn to leadership for direction and information at times of crisis. This helps contribute towards employees feeling safe knowing their leadership is involved and taking the lead. Your communication should include:
  - the verified facts about the incident that may be disclosed;
  - what actions the organization is taking to address the incident and restore safety and order;
  - the additional resources the organization is partnering with, i.e. EMS, police, FBI, EAP etc.; and
  - contact information for key personnel, including wellness resources.

  Provide this information often and in a variety of formats (live, emails, video, etc.)

- **Above all, be visible!**
Arranging On-site Services

Onsite support services by PAS professional response teams can be arranged any time after an incident has occurred. PAS recognizes that there are different recovery stages employees and organizations will go through. PAS can adjust the type and duration of interventions to promote the maximum benefit and recovery to employees.

When you contact PAS for initial consultation, PAS will begin mobilizing response staff, obtain the necessary information and provide immediate coaching. PAS’ goal is to help maximize leadership effectiveness and responsiveness. PAS is available throughout the process to help restore a normal, productive work environment.

Your Initial Call to PAS

While the immediate needs are being addressed, a designated point person from your organization should contact PAS at (800) 356-0845 to discuss the following so that a plan of action can be developed:

EMPLOYEE IMPACT
- Nature of the critical or traumatic incident
- Death(s) and/or injuries
- Identify employees and/or workgroups who were in the immediate area of the impact
- What have been the reactions witnessed from those in the immediate area?
- How are impacted personnel reacting as of the time of this call?
- How are employees doing who are outside of this immediate contact area or have secondary knowledge of the event?
- Are there employees you have specific concerns about?
- Who is the contact person for this group (name and contact information)?

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT
- Is the organization still in operation?
- Are employees able to return to work?
- Do they need to temporarily relocate to work?
- Has the perception of safety been altered?

ORGANIZATION RESPONSE
- Is there a contingency plan in operation?
- Is there an ongoing investigation or operation that will impair the ability of PAS responders to access the site?
- What were the organization’s first actions in responding to the impact?
- Have all of the involved leadership been able to meet?
- What is presently being done to restore or assure safety?
- How have employees responded to leadership’s efforts?

INITIAL ACTIONS OF RESILIENCE
- Have employees been able to contact family?
- Have employees been able to offer support to each other?
- Has leadership been visible and accessible?
- Are employees helping one and other?
• Are employees volunteering to help the organization?
• Have communications been delivered?

WHEN PAS ARRIVES
• Will PAS need special security clearance, clothing or other approved access?
• Consider areas for private meetings (away from highly visited areas, i.e. cafeterias, restrooms)
• Will onsite leadership be available to brief on employee status, organizational initiatives to restore productivity?
• Arrange for a meeting between PAS and leadership. Include all leadership who have direct involvement with the incident and the organization’s response
• In consultation with PAS, determine what services will be most effective (e.g. group, groups defined by level of impact, individual, combination)

We understand that not all of this information may be available to you immediately after a critical incident. PAS will work with you to gather information and assess for your organization’s support needs.

After the Call
What helps employees feel safe and begin the process of resilience is seeing their leadership involved immediately after a Critical Incident. While there may be many items on the agenda that need attention as a result of the incident, leadership visibility is required. When employees are impacted at work, they look towards leadership to restore control. They look for the signs that all will be well, despite how the incident disrupted them. Consider the following actions that your leadership team can take that will send a message of restoration:

• Walk around. Ask employees how they are doing. Shake their hand. Use good eye contact and repeat back or paraphrase what they say. This is called Reflective Listening and it builds trust.
• Bring in lunch or a snack. Let them know you want to make their day a little easier.
• Offer assistance to do their job. Pitch in doing work you would not ordinarily do.
• If there are additional tasks as a result of the incident, seek volunteers. Support from other employees can ease tensions.
• Keep your communications consistent and forth coming. Employees are seeking information and as time goes on, more sources for information (media) become available and may be inaccurate and/or contradictory. It is your message that counts!
• Involve family. Critical incidents impact all systems. Family members are also evaluating your response for their significant other (employee).
• When the EAP consultant arrives, go around and introduce him/her.

Remember this is not a usual day, but employees will remember how the company’s leadership responded during this time, and it will have a lasting effect. Employees remember who was there during their most vulnerable moments.