

November, 2009

US Army Corps of Engineers

Annual Performance Report for CISM Program

Mission Statement

The mission of the Critical Incident Stress Management program is to provide support, assistance and education to USACE employees for incidental or cumulative critical incident stress experienced in the performance of their jobs and/or in the event of major civil emergencies, natural disasters, or military contingencies.

Overview

- The USACE CISM program works to enhance and improve the mental health of USACE employees.
- Violence, natural disasters, death/suicide, emergency care of ill or injured groups, affect Corps employees on all levels and impact the entire USACE community.
- Unaddressed, these incidents de-stabilize the sense of community within a work group and interfere with the day to day operations.
- Comprehensive in nature, the team provides the organization with guidelines for **Primary** prevention efforts:
 - ✓ conflict resolution
 - ✓ suicide prevention
 - ✓ pre-crisis preparation

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- The team provides **Secondary** prevention or the immediate response to a crisis:
 - ✓ Demobilization
 - ✓ Crisis Management Briefing
 - ✓ Defusing
 - ✓ Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
 - ✓ Individual Crisis Intervention
- The team also provides **Tertiary** prevention which is monitoring and supporting those involved in a critical incident. This includes:
 - ✓ Referral to EAP
 - ✓ Referral to other appropriate resources
 - ✓ Organizational Consultation
 - ✓ Follow-up or Reach Backs
- The program has shown a dramatic increase in the FY 09 numbers and has reached significantly more individuals this year.

The USACE is fortunate to have a team of well-trained individuals who strive to improve through education and experience to:

- 1) Provide consultation & assistance to site management;
- 2) Assist management in assessing staff needs;
- 3) Render support to staff;
- 4) Provide referral and follow-up services; and
- 5) Provide adequate support and care for USACE CISM Team members.

The clinical education to provide the services mentioned above is extensive and includes Basic and Advanced Critical Incident Stress Management, Peer Support, and Strategic Response to Crisis, as

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well as Suicide Prevention. The USACE CISM team of peer supporters is one of the most highly trained teams in the country.

Interventions

David Cheek, M.D. studied cases of severe stress for over 25 years and concluded, as have many other clinicians and researchers, “that severe stress invariably causes an altered state. When we are afraid, in pain, or shocked by grief, we revert to earlier moments of great stress, both in our minds and in our bodies” (Acosta & Prager, 2002). Lt. Col. Grossman (1996) calls this reverting “operating with the midbrain, which is, after millions of years still the same midbrain of the crocodile.”

The first step in coping more effectively with trauma is to recognize its impact. This can involve feelings, thoughts, relationships, behaviors, attitudes, dreams, and hopes. That first step often begins with a CISM-trained peer. The information and compassion provided can set a person up for recovery and healing.

In the past year, the USACE CISM team provided training on:

- ✓ CISM Orientation
- ✓ Suicide Prevention

This training impacted a record **1,233 individuals**.

The team continues to reach out to those involved in incidents with phone calls, letters and informational brochures.

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Melissa Salsgiver noted in an email to a manager:

“CISM interventions can give individuals the opportunity to release emotions but also the opportunity to verbalize their specific thoughts, fears, regrets, etc. Bruno Bettelheim, 1984 stated that, "What cannot be talked about can also not be put to rest; and if it is not, the wounds continue to fester...." It has been found that when people cannot put a traumatic experience into words they tend to dream about it and obsess over it. If it goes unresolved then there is even more distress.”

Mark Roderick encouraged another manager in an email:

“In conjunction with the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), a CISM Peer Supporter Team can provide one-on-one or group debriefing to manage an employee's "initial" grief, lessening the impact and facilitating recovery . . . It is important for your staff to note that all information shared during one-on-one sessions and debriefings are kept confidential, no notes are taken so an employee may feel comfortable relating their experiences.”

- The CISM Peer Team increased their Crisis Management Briefings in 2009 to **17**, compared with only **4** in 2008
- This team has provided **99** one-on-one responses which compares with **37** in 2008.
- In 2008, we had record of **one** Assessment; however, in 2009, **70** Assessment Interviews were logged.

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- **Five** Debriefings or Defusings in 2009 were conducted compared with **7** in 2008. This number has decreased only slightly from 2008 which may be due to the Team providing more varied support in the form of Assessments and One-on-One Sessions.
- Follow-up is key and the team made following up with individuals involved in an incident a priority by providing **7** EAP Referrals and **618** Reach Back Contacts.

The assistance provided certainly signifies more than numbers. The individuals who received services generally had a more positive perspective on the overall organization and were especially appreciative of their command for having brought the program. Positive comments shared by employees following one-on-one sessions, debriefings or Crisis Management briefings include, “very helpful,” “I would recommend this to others,” “information provided was very helpful to eliminate rumors,” “Thank you,” “Glad to have someone to talk to.” An individual was identified after a one-on-one session as having suicidal ideation. “. . .it was our attention that identified a possible problem and may have saved this person’s life” and “In conclusion, we were able to make a difference and were thanked generously for our work by all with whom we came in contact, including the ones who [initially] didn’t want us there!” (excerpt from USACE CISM Response Tracking Form).

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Recommendations

I am pleased with the direction of this program, the level of commitment from USACE HQ, mid-management, and peer participants, as well as the implementation of educational components. My recommendation is to continue to add new peer supporters, continue communication and education efforts in order to increase effectiveness and provide more services. I would also like to see the Response Tracking Forms adjusted to include number of individuals receiving services. This information is generally included as part of the report, but changing the form will emphasize that portion of accountability.

As I have noted previously, this group is one of the best trained teams I have had the pleasure of working with. The individuals who comprise this group are compassionate and knowledgeable and understand the importance of mitigating the effects of negative stress.

I look forward to continuing my relationship with this team, Vaughn Donaldson and the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Respectfully submitted,

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