



LIFEGUARDS – RESOURCES FOR WORK-RELATED TRAUMA

A new not-for-profit organization is hoping to help lifeguards recover from trauma experienced during critical incidents.ⁱ

The [International Lifeguard Critical Incident Response Alliance](#) notes in its mission statement that the organization "envisions a world where aquatics management teams, lifeguards, and allied support staff are fully equipped with comprehensive education, training, and consultations services, enabling them to resiliently navigate and manage the aftermath of critical incidents."ⁱⁱ

Lifeguards are an integral part of our public safety operations. Our personnel should be treated with respect and have readily available resources when a critical incident occurs. Many of our lifeguards are young, and the unexpected site of persons who are severely injured or suddenly die may be traumatic. Training for these situations and recognizing the potential for bad outcomes and the effect these incidents may have on our personnel may be overwhelming. We need to have resources readily available to help with their recovery.

Every critical incident must be documented: who, what, where, when, how, and if known, why? All personnel on the scene must be identified and debriefed on what occurred. An operational debrief should be conducted within 72 hours of the incident. The debrief should be done in private, in a secure place, and isolated from the media and the public. Attendance should include the agency leader, duty officer, safety officer, training personnel, and everyone present at the incident.

During the meeting, mental health resources should be discussed. Emphasize that using the resources is appropriate and encouraged and that no criticism will occur. Explain that the request to use these resources should be made privately. How an employee can obtain help should be outlined in the organization's policy manual.

Several providers are located throughout the State, and research on which provider would best meet your needs must be explored. Policies, cost, hours of service, experience dealing with first responders, and geography are some of the factors that need to be considered. Click on this [link](#) for an example of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Questions need to be asked: does the municipality have an "Employee Assistance Program" that allows our lifeguards to contact the EAP privately to seek assistance? Do lifeguard entity supervisors have access to a referral service? Do we have a policy that addresses traumatic incidents, which may include follow-up interviews, referral policies, and duty assignments?

These are good questions that need attention. Recruiting and maintaining personnel levels is always a challenge. Lifeguard agencies must address these risks and provide services that assist with the aftermath of critical incidents involving their personnel.

Resources:

ⁱ <https://www.athleticbusiness.com/operations/safety-security/article/15681338/new-nonprofit-aims-to-help-lifeguards-deal-with-jobrelated-trauma>

ⁱⁱ <https://ilcira.org/>