

# LS14

## POST INCIDENT (RECOVERY PHASE)



# LS14.1 MEDIA – CRITICAL INCIDENTS



NEW SOUTH  
WALES

Section: LS14 Post Incident (Recovery Phase)

Page: 1 of 2

Date: 20<sup>th</sup> September 2014

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## PURPOSE

To provide guidelines for consideration when dealing with the media in relation to 'critical incidents'.

## POLICY

Positive interaction with media is important for the organisation. It is imperative however that those media enquiries are handled by the appropriate lifesaving personnel.

Generally critical incidents are defined by Surf Life Saving as either (or a combination) of the following:

- Incident resulting in death (including unsuccessful CPR, body recovery);
- Incident resulting in serious/major injury (shark attack/propeller strike);
- Incident whereby a member of SLS is seriously injured (requiring hospitalisation);
- Incident whereby a member of the public is injured by lifesaving personnel/equipment (requiring external medical treatment or hospitalisation).

## PROCEDURE

### Critical Incident Media - Procedure

1. For any 'critical incident' the SLSNSW Media Manager (or 13SURF) shall be notified as soon as practical.
2. Lifesaving personnel may disregard any media enquiries during the response phase of an incident.
3. The senior lifesaving member involved (Patrol Captain/Lifeguard Supervisor/Duty Officer) shall assume the role of media contact until advised otherwise. This person shall direct media enquiries to the State Media Manager.
4. The senior lifesaving personnel shall restrict media comment by any other lifesaving personnel.
5. The State Media Manager shall establish the facts, communicate with key personnel involved (including the Branch DOL) and establish a media plan.
6. The media plan may involve the identification and briefing of an appropriate local (club/branch) spokesperson, or may delegate the role to the State Lifesaving Manager (or other State Officer).

### General Media Enquiries (non-critical)

General media enquiries (e.g. hours of operation, surf conditions, patrol activity, etc) should be treated as a positive opportunity to represent/promote the organisation.

The Patrol Captain/Lifeguard Supervisor may deal with this directly or refer the media to the Club Captain/Branch DOL or Lifeguard Supervisor.

**Note:** If the enquiry is more serious or potentially negative, the matter should be referred to the Branch DOL or State Media Manager.

### Presentation/Public Image

Members should ensure that they are presenting themselves in correct, full uniform at all times if staging photos or doing video interviews for the media.

Equipment and patrol setup should always be as per SOPs.

Do not be influenced to stage a photo or video which is against SOPs or might bring the organisation into disrepute.

# LS14.1 MEDIA – CRITICAL INCIDENTS



**NEW SOUTH  
WALES**

**Section:** LS14 Post Incident (Recovery Phase)

**Page:** 2 of 2

**Date:** 20<sup>th</sup> September 2014

---

## **Rules of Thumb:**

- If you are unsure as to whether or not you should answer a question or make comment to the media, always refer it to the next level.
- Stick to the facts
  - this is what happened,
  - this is what we did,
  - this was the outcome,
  - these are the key safety messages.
- Never engage in hearsay/rumour/innuendo.
- Never appoint blame.
- There is no such thing as 'off the record.'
- You have control of what you say and how you look – don't be 'dictated to' by reporters.
- If you can't, don't want to or don't think you should answer a question – DON'T.  
State: "I am not the appropriate person to comment on that, please contact the State Media Manager"

## **REFERENCE**

SLSNSW Media Kit.

Duty Officer Media Check Sheet.

# LS14.2 CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEFING

Section: LS14 Post Incident (Recovery Phase)

Page: 1 of 5

Date: 20<sup>th</sup> September 2014



**NEW SOUTH WALES**

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## PURPOSE

To outline relevant procedures/processes and provide consistent and structured delivery of effective Critical Incident Debriefing.

## POLICY

The environment in which surf life saving operates has the potential for members to be involved in serious incidents of a high-intensity and traumatic nature, and which do often involve death, serious injury and/or significant risk to lifesaving personnel. These are referred to as 'critical incidents'.

## PROCEDURE

### Why should a Critical Incident Debrief be undertaken?

A critical incident debrief is undertaken to ensure that:

1. Member welfare/support is optimised
2. The ability to re-establish core lifesaving services is achieved
3. Obligatory paperwork and data is recorded, collected and forwarded appropriately
4. The Surf Life Saving response is documented for future review or for legal reasons (if required)
5. Surf Life Saving is best positioned (through effective data collection) to provide drowning prevention recommendations to the Coroner and relevant local government authorities.

### Who should deliver/lead Critical Incident Debrief?

The Branch Duty Officer (or equivalent) should lead every Critical Incident Debrief as part of the incident Recovery Phase. If a Duty Officer is not available an appropriate Branch Officer should be tasked to deliver the debrief.

### When/where should a Critical Incident Debrief be undertaken?

The debrief should take place as soon as possible after the incident has finished, at a location which does not require much travel e.g. the Surf Life Saving Club. The debrief should be conducted in a secure room, with no thoroughfare and isolated from any media or public interference.

### Who should attend?

All SLS personnel who were involved in the incident should attend, regardless of the level of involvement. Delivery of the debrief as soon as possible is important in this respect to ensure full attendance. Any personnel not in attendance should be recorded in the debrief form and followed up by the Duty Officer.

External agency / public involvement : A joint SLS-External agency debrief can be organised following or at a later date, involving the key senior members involved (Duty Officer, Patrol Captain, Senior Lifeguard, Police Sgt etc).

# LS14.2 CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEFING

Section: LS14 Post Incident (Recovery Phase)

Page: 2 of 5

Date: 20<sup>th</sup> September 2014



**NEW SOUTH WALES**

**The critical incident process can be broken into three separate parts:**

1. Operational Debrief
2. Emotive Debrief (Psychological First Aid)
3. Expert Counselling (as required post incident)

## 1. Operational Debrief

The Duty Officer shall lead/coordinate the Operational Debrief and record each members involvement (who was involved and in what capacity), contact details and the sequence of events - from first notification through to the end of the incident. Key actions and timings are recorded as best able within the sequence of events.

| CHECKLIST FOR DUTY OFFICERS:    |   |                                |        |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|--------|
| Time:                           | Completed Form / Log:   | Completed by:                  | Y or N |
| Within 48 hours of the incident | Critical Incident Debrief Log – Operational (CIDL)– Completed in full                           | Duty Officer                   |        |
|                                 | ‘Patrol Log’ – completed in full, copied and attached to Critical Incident Debrief Log          | Patrol, handed to Duty Officer |        |
|                                 | ‘Incident Report Log’ – completed in full, copied and attached to Critical Incident Debrief Log | Patrol, handed to Duty Officer |        |

NOTE: ALL paperwork sent to Branch Director of Lifesaving within 48 hours after incident

## 2. Emotive Debrief (Psychological First Aid)

Critical incidents can have a strong emotional impact, which can overwhelm the usually effective coping skills of the individual or group. Members may experience a number of different reactions to a critical incident, all of which are completely normal. Psychological First Aid focuses on member wellbeing and coping, and will form a significant part of the Duty Officer role when dealing with critical incidents.

The Duty Officer shall lead the Emotive Debrief session and in essence the first part of it can commence (covertly) within the Operational Debrief. Specifically in the Emotive Debrief the Duty Officer will:

- Observe and record any members displaying obvious emotional trauma.
- Outline the effects that traumatic events can have on people (straight away and delayed on-set).
- Outline what support is available and how to access it (hotline, counselling sessions).
- Provide supporting information (brochures, contact information).
- Outline the process ‘from here’ as far as follow-up, accessing additional support etc.

LS14. Post Incident (Recovery Phase)

# LS14.2 CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEFING

Section: LS14 Post Incident (Recovery Phase)

Page: 3 of 5

Date: 20<sup>th</sup> September 2014



**NEW SOUTH WALES**

## CHECKLIST FOR DUTY OFFICERS:

| Time:   | Completed Form / Log:   | Completed by:                   | Y or N |
|---|---|---------------------------------|--------|
| Within 12 hours of the incident                 | Names of ALL members involved sent to lifesaving@surflifesaving.com.au  | Duty Officer                    |        |
|   | Notification of Injury Form – Workcover form handed out to each member involved and submitted to WorkCover by the member. | Filled out by members           |        |
| Completed between 48 – 72 hours of the incident | Critical Incident Debrief Log – Emotive (CIDL) – Completed in full  | Duty Officer                    |        |
|   | Witness Statement forms (individual) – completed and attached to Critical Incident Debrief Log                            | Members, handed to Duty Officer |        |
|   | Photos of the scene e.g. swell, environment, signage, access points<br><br>*NO photos of CPR, injury or the patient       | Duty Officer                    |        |

NOTE: ALL paperwork sent to Branch Director of Lifesaving 48 – 72 hours after incident.

### 3. Expert Counselling– if required.

SLSNSW has a contract with a private counselling organisation. Expert counselling plays the following roles in SLS Critical Incidents:

- Provision of trauma information/brochures
- Provision of three free 24/7 counselling sessions to members once approved by SLSNSW
- Provision of psychological first aid (emotive debrief) training to Branch Duty Officers and Peer Support Officers
- Provision of group counselling sessions for significantly traumatic critical incidents

### Accessing expert counselling:

Individual Counselling Session (post-incident): Members (or their parents for 18years or younger) can request an individual counselling session as they deem necessary.

## REFERENCE

Media – Critical Incident

Emotive Debriefs (Physiological First Aid)

# LS14.2 CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEFING

Section: LS14 Post Incident (Recovery Phase)

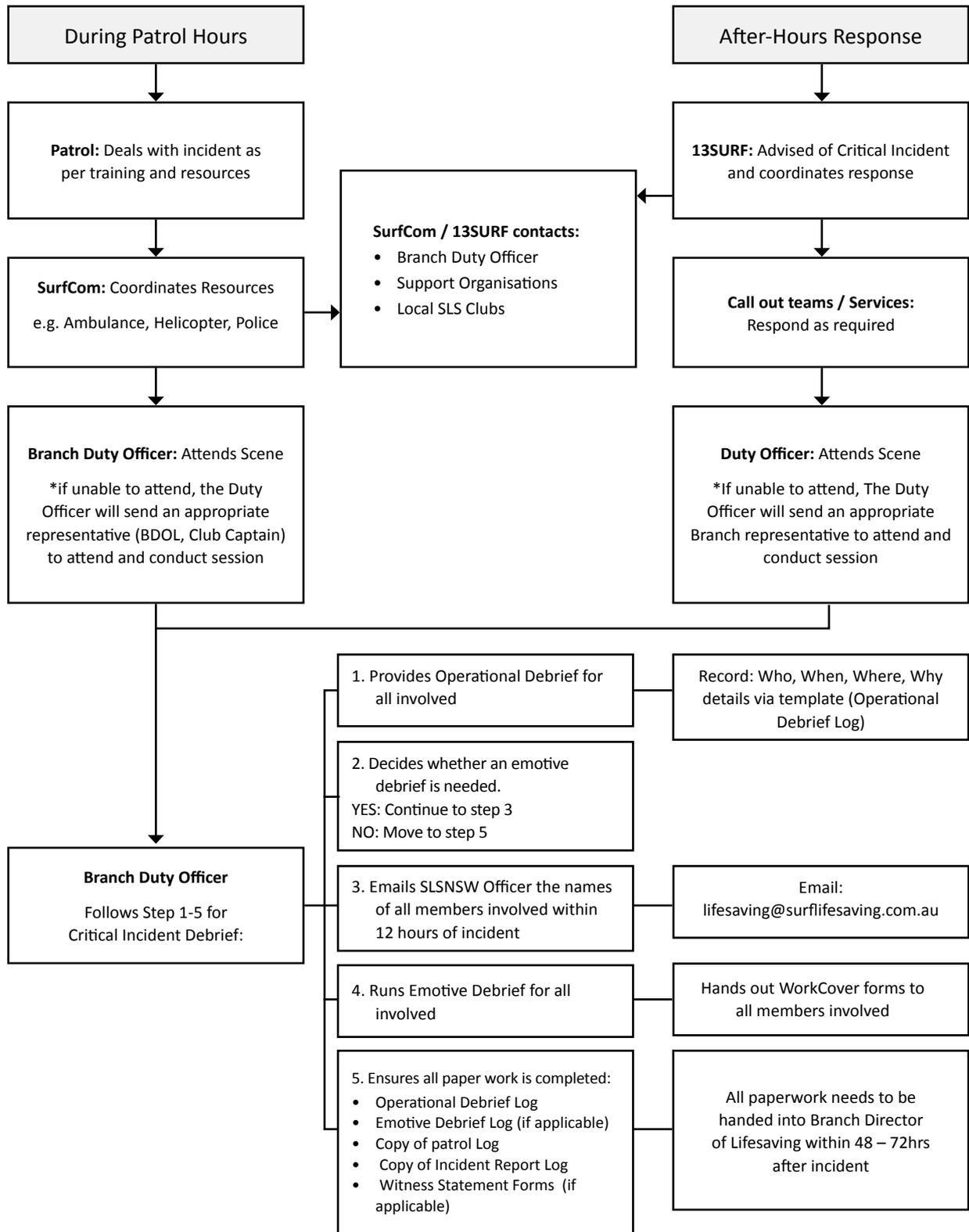
Page: 4 of 5

Date: 20<sup>th</sup> September 2014



**NEW SOUTH WALES**

## Critical Incident Debrief Flow-Chart



LS14. Post Incident (Recovery Phase)

# LS14.2 CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEFING



**NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Section:** LS14 Post Incident (Recovery Phase)

**Page:** 5 of 5

**Date:** 20<sup>th</sup> September 2014

## WHAT INCIDENTS NEED A CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEF?

Surf Life Saving Critical incidents may take the form of (but not limited to):

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incidents involving death of a patient</li> <li>• CPR (successful or unsuccessful)</li> <li>• Drowning</li> <li>• Failure to save a life</li> <li>• Shark Attack</li> <li>• A member of SLS is seriously injured</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duty Officer attendance to scene - COMPULSARY</li> <li>• Operational &amp; Emotive Critical Debrief conducted - COMPULSARY</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major injury with hospitalisation</li> <li>• Major rescues</li> <li>• Severe trauma</li> <li>• Abuse</li> <li>• Aggressive Behaviour</li> <li>• Heart Attack</li> <li>• Severe asthma attacks</li> </ul>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duty Officer attendance to scene - COMPULSARY</li> <li>• Operational debrief conducted - COMPULSARY</li> <li>• Emotive Critical Debrief conducted - IF requested by the Patrol or Club Captain</li> </ul> |

### If the following Signs and Symptoms are evident post incident, an Emotive Debrief **MUST** be run:

- Sleep disturbance.
- Marked symptoms of anxiety: restlessness, irritability, anger.
- Withdrawal from others: loss of motivation.
- Increased substance use e.g. drugs or alcohol.
- Appearing like 'being in a daze' / feeling detached.
- Difficulties with concentration, attention and decision making.
- Appearing preoccupied or emotionally 'flat' or fatigued.

# LS14.3 EMOTIVE DEBRIEFS (PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID)



**NEW SOUTH  
WALES**

**Section:** LS14 Post Incident (Recovery Phase)

**Page:** 1 of 2

**Date:** 20<sup>th</sup> September 2014

---

## **PURPOSE**

To outline the process for 'emotive debriefs' following a critical incident.

## **POLICY**

An emotive debrief should be conducted after any critical incident has occurred as part of the overall Critical Incident Debrief process. Emotive debriefs are conducted to ensure members welfare is optimised and the ability to re-establish core lifesaving services is achieved.

## **PROCEDURE:**

Critical incidents can have a strong emotional impact, which can overwhelm the usually effective coping skills of the individual or group. Members may experience a number of different reactions to a critical incident, all of which are completely normal. Duty Officers, Club Members and families play an important role in ensuring that the Member Counselling Service is used effectively. Recognising the early warning signs of a member experiencing on-going reactions and knowing how to refer that member to the Member Counselling Service is a very important role.

The Duty Officer shall lead the emotive debrief session (in essence the first part can commence (covertly) within the operational debrief), specifically in the emotive debrief the Duty Officer will:

- Observe and record any members displaying obvious emotional trauma;
- Outline the effects that traumatic events can have on people (immediate/delayed on-set);
- Outline what support is available and how to access it (hotline, counselling sessions);
- Provide supporting information (brochures, contact information);
- Outline the process 'from here' as far as follow-up, accessing additional support etc;
- Ensure all members directly involved complete the WorkCover 'notification of injury form.'

## **When to seek professional counselling?**

Following a traumatic event it's common and normal for the member to experience a range of emotions, including numbness, fear, anxiety, guilt, sadness, anger and regret. These acute reactions generally subside over time as the members involved process the experience and come to terms with the event.

Following an incident SLSNSW has a contract with a private counselling organisation. Expert counselling plays the following roles in SLS Critical Incidents:

- Provision of trauma information/brochures
- Provision of three free 24/7 counselling sessions to members once approved by SLSNSW
- Provision of psychological first aid (emotive debrief) training to Branch Duty Officers and Peer Support Officers
- Provision of group counselling sessions for significantly traumatic critical incidents

Once telephone counselling has been completed and WorkCover forms have been submitted, WorkCover will get involved and assign a case worker to the member. Seeking confidential professional counselling will offer the member the opportunity to talk about and process their experience, understand reactions and assist with the recovery process. The WorkCover counsellor will work with the member to assist with healthy coping behaviours to manage and reduce any distressing reactions and/or negative impact.

# LS14.3 EMOTIVE DEBRIEFS (PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID)



**NEW SOUTH  
WALES**

**Section:** LS14 Post Incident (Recovery Phase)

**Page:** 2 of 2

**Date:** 20<sup>th</sup> September 2014

---

## **Confidentiality**

Expert counselling and WorkCover are confidential from the moment you call in. No information from sessions with the counsellor can be disclosed. The WorkCover notification form is the only form of disclosure you will need to make.

## **Follow Up Welfare Check**

As the symptoms of trauma on members can present themselves some time after the incident, It is important that the Branch Duty Officer involved, Branch Director of Lifesaving, Club Captain and Club President communicate post-incident to discuss the event and the need to ensure that the members involved are monitored and provided ongoing support (if required).

## **REFERENCE:**

Critical Incident Debrief

Critical Incident Debrief Pack