

CRITICAL INCIDENT CARE

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SUMMARY

Every year in Canada, approximately 300 collisions and trespassing incidents occur at highway/railway crossings and along railway tracks resulting in the death or serious injury of nearly 130 people. What is often forgotten and remains untold is the impact that these incidents have on railway employees who are involved. They are living victims.

VIA Rail in partnership with the TCRC have worked together to help employees recover from the impact and injuries following a traumatizing incident. This impact is not only limited to them, it also extends to the members of their families and their co-workers.

In 2012 VIA Rail enhanced its Critical Incident Care program. In addition to the VIA Rail Peer Support program we've introduced a new Critical Incident Support Protocol. This is strongly supported by VIA Rail management and its union representatives. We provide mandatory 72 hours away from the work place and offer an additional 48 hours. Another highlight of the new protocol is that arrangements are made for an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counsellor to meet the locomotive engineer upon arrival following an incident. Initial contact is established and an opportunity is given to the employees for extended care. This care is also extended to their families and all other employees impacted by an incident.

INTRODUCTION

There are two key components to the VIA Rail Critical Care program. One is the critical incident support protocol mentioned above and the other is Peer Support. In 1994 VIA Rail began its search to find a solution to assist locomotive engineers involved in traumatising incidents.

The research led to a team of post traumatic experts who had created a program for the Union Pacific Railroad company. This program was called Peer Support. The program was piloted at VIA Rail in 1995 with a team of management and unionised employees.

Specifically, the program was designed to assist employees suffering from different types of stress following involvement in a traumatising incident. At that time, in many cases employees involved in an incident were left on their own to deal with this stress; they were even asked to finish their trip. Some employees would be off work for long periods of time and most would not seek help.

The Peer Support component of the Critical Incident Care program has been well received over the years and has made a tremendous impact for both the healing and the return to work process. However it was felt strongly that more was needed thus the introduction of the Critical Incident Support Protocol which reflects the new measures taken post incident.

PEER SUPPORT

Peer Support was officially launched in 1996 with the goal to have co-workers help other co-workers who had experienced post-traumatic stress after a critical incident. The program was originally designed for Locomotive Engineers who had been involved in a traumatising incident. Empathy, support and confidentiality between two co-workers following a critical incident are what the Peer Support program is all about. Following a review of the program it was decided to offer the sessions to other employees (OTS, Stations and facilities) involved in a traumatising event. The session was delivered once a year and was increased to twice a year in 2010.

Who helped us develop the program?

Dr Roger Solomon PhD, who is a clinical psychologist specializing in trauma and grief. He is Senior Faculty member of the *Eye Motion Desensitization and Reprocessing Institute* and teaches EMDR internationally. He has worked with people directly involved with the loss of the *Columbia* shuttle and numerous airlines and railroads' fatal/catastrophic events. Roger has authored 32 articles on EMDR, trauma (including railroad personnel, police officers, and war veterans), and grief. His presence has been essential in establishing and continuing Peer Support at several railroads, law enforcement agencies, and disaster scenes.

Mr Timothy Kaufmann, began his career at Union Pacific as an locomotive engineer. Later he left the railroad to join the Jesuits and was ordained a priest. While a Jesuit he spent 20 years studying, teaching, and doing extensive counselling with university students and faculty. He then returned to the Union Pacific and was hired as the first ombudsman to the Chairman. He was tasked to address concerns of 35,000 employees. One of those tasks was helping employees to deal with post incident trauma. He founded Peer Support at Union Pacific in 1990 and exported it to VIA Rail in 1996. Along with Roger Solomon, he has presented more than 125 Peer Support workshops at VIA Rail and various railroads.

Sam Brooks who was a locomotive engineer for 34 years with the Union Pacific Railroad. He was living proof that Peer Support worked. He had been involved in over 30 incidents, most of them fatalities.

Between the three of them they brought different points of views and credibility to the program. One had the psychological (clinical) view, another the spiritual and management views, and the other had the employee perspective. VIA management and union representatives were also consulted on the development of the program.

What goes on in a Peer Support training session?

The participants are taken to a secluded area in order to have their full attention. The workshop sessions go on from morning till evening. It begins with an introduction and its objectives, there is a discussion on expectations and the participants are asked to think about the traumatising experience that affects them the most. Once they have identified this experience, they are asked to rank it, according to a given scale. The higher the score, the higher the experience impacts them, their lives, and their work. After having ranked this experience, they are asked to share it within the group. Once this is done the healing process begins.

Those who have scored highly on the impact of event scale, receive "*Eye Movement Desensitisation Reprocessing*" (EMDR). The participants are then exposed to Peer Support by defining what is a critical incident and go through the Six Phases of Critical Incident Trauma. Each phase is explained in depth to the participants and teaches them to recognize the reactions of a peer who has been exposed to a traumatising event. These phases include perceptual distortion during stress, shock and disruption, emotional impact, coping, acceptance and resolution, and learning to grow and live with it. Participants are then taught how to offer Peer Support to a co-worker that has been exposed to a traumatising event, by practicing active listening within their groups.

Who are the members of the Peer Support Group?

They are employees who have been through a critical incident themselves, and who have been chosen because of their compassionate qualities. They must follow an intense training program on Post-Traumatic Stress and active listening. These co-workers learn to not only recognize warning signs of an employee in distress, but also to confront these difficult situations and overcome the stress involved to promote recovery. VIA managers also participate in the training and are part of the support team.

How does the program work?

Each region has a support team supervised by an employee who is the Regional Coordinator. This person is immediately contacted by the Crew Management Centre or the Operations Control following a critical incident. The Regional Coordinator contacts the members of his team who would be best suited to communicate with the employees involved.

Why do employees need Peer Support?

A person may need this because they should not be left alone in confronting the stress caused by the critical incident. It is perfectly normal to feel unnecessary guilt or anger but these are not solutions. Co-workers who have experienced a similar situation are there to help.

Members of the program give of their time voluntarily because they understand the importance of friendly support after a traumatic incident. And if they feel it is necessary, they will recommend consultation with a professional from the Employee Assistance Program.

CRITICAL INCIDENT SUPPORT PROTOCOL

In 2010 a review of the Critical Incident Care program was conducted and it was determined that there were further needs to help employees cope with traumatising situations. Following the evaluation of the care given to employees post incident, it was decided that employees involved in a traumatising event would be given an automatic 72 hours away from work with pay. It was also determined that an Employee Assistance Program counsellor would be dispatched to the employees work place in order to meet them upon their arrival. The protocol is all about normalising the situation for the employee involved.

Who developed the program?

Sub-committee of the National Joint Management Labour Health and Safety Policy Committee.

Who does it apply to?

To all employees present at the time of the incident in the cab or other employees that may have witnessed an incident.

When does the protocol apply?

Following a traumatising incident where an employee could be affected by the event.

What is the protocol?

- Following a critical incident the employee is relieved from his duties immediately.
- The employee involved in the event is to be treated as a victim and not be judged.
- Peer Support is activated.
- Arrangements are made for an EAP counsellor to meet or contact the employee upon his/her arrival at the terminal.
- If it was impossible to have an EAP counsellor at the terminal because of the location of the incident, arrangements for an EAP counsellor are made for them to call the employee.
- A manager is dispatched to the site in order to relieve the crew of the On-Site Commander position.
- Employee is to be relieved of his/her duties for a period of at least 72 hours with an additional 48 hours at the employee request.
- The employee is encouraged to accept transportation home after his arrival at the terminal.
- Arrangements are made for the retrieval of the employee's vehicle.

On-going care and follow-up

- Employees will be encouraged to use the EAP services.
- Employees may opt to seek care from their personal physician.
- Their manager will keep in touch with them for proper follow up.

CONCLUSION

Despite the number of collisions and trespassing incidents experienced by our operating crews, with the enhancements to the Peer Support program and the introduction of Critical Incident Support Protocol there has been considerable reduction of time loss and lost time injuries due to post traumatic incidents.

We have minimized the impact on our living victims. This program's effectiveness remains closely monitored by VIA and TCRC leaders.

The cost associated with the mandatory and optional time off far outweighs the psychological costs to an employee and extended time off costs to the organization when an employee is not provided the time and support required immediately following a post-traumatic incident.