

# EUROCONTROL

## Critical Incident Stress Management

### Implementation Quick Guide





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## HOW TO USE THIS QUICK GUIDE

This booklet is a short version of the EUROCONTROL CISM Implementation Guidelines. It supports you with some important aspects setting up a CISM programme.

Being a quick guide it does not serve as an comprehensive explanation of CISM. The chapters are a summary of the different steps for the implementation of a CISM programme.

It is recommended to contact EUROCONTROL or/and other Air Navigation Services Providers (ANSPs) and/or to take part in the EUROCONTROL Safety Human Performance Sub Group (SHPSG) if support referred to the CISM programme is needed.

Last but not least: Stay enthusiastic to build up CISM in your organisation!

For more information about implementing CISM look at the above mentioned CISM Implementation Guidelines and the two corresponding videos on Skybrary: <https://www.skybrary.aero/index.php/Critical-Incident-Stress-Management-in-ATM>

# WHAT IS CISM?

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) is a structured and well-established peer based programme to support people/colleagues after a critical incident to facilitate recovery and resilience.

CISM is more than a single intervention method. It is a comprehensive programme with different intervention methods for individuals, small groups, large groups, organisations and families.

The outlined CISM programme is based on concepts and intervention methods developed and continuously evaluated by the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF).

Being a validated CISM programme, it is recognized and applied by different organizations worldwide e.g. the United Nations, in Healthcare and in Aviation.

Meanwhile a number of European ANSPs also have adopted this CISM programme with very satisfying results.





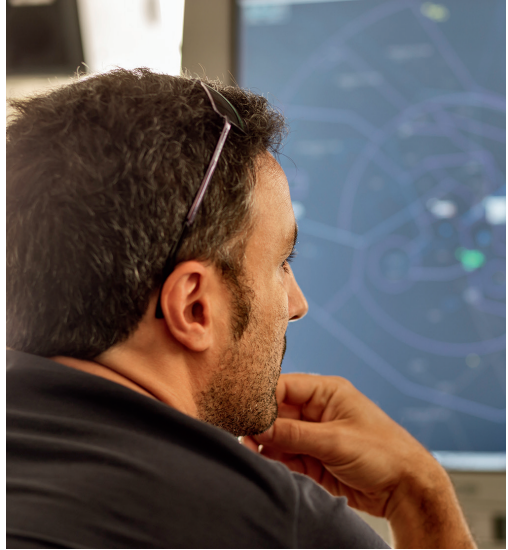
# WHAT IS A CRITICAL INCIDENT?

A critical incident could be any situation that causes unusual stress reactions of individuals involved in the situation/event.

Therefore, the definition of a critical incident (CI) is based on the stress reactions and not on the incident itself.

People react differently depending on the exposure to the incident, their physical and their mental condition. Especially operators with high responsible tasks such as air traffic controllers (ATCOs) may suffer from critical incident stress (CIS) reactions even in the case of minor critical situations/events for example near misses etc.

Although CIS reactions might be very irritating and pop-up unexpectedly after an incident happened, they are **normal reactions** of normal people to an **abnormal event**.



*A critical incident is any situation that causes a person to experience unusual strong stress reactions that the person perceives as disturbing or disabling. Besides accidents, also minor events may be experienced as a critical incident specific to this working environment.*



## WHAT ARE CIS REACTIONS?

**Critical incident stress** reactions (CIS) are reactions of the Autonomus Nervous System, which can be intense and expressed in various ways by different individuals. They can occur at different levels, each containing several 'symptoms':

- Psychological level
- Cognitive level
- Physical level
- Behavioral level.

The person affected may not be able to cope with theses unfamiliar emotional, cognitive and/or physical reactions she/he is experiencing. It is important to understand that all of them are normal human reactions to an abnormal event.

While most symptoms appear immediately after a critical incident (CI), CIS reactions that affect the cognitive level may be only noticed when, for example, quick decisions have to be made. Therefore, CIS reactions can also become safety relevant.

In the worst case, CIS reactions could last a long time and lead to occupational disability.



# WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE BEFORE IMPLEMENTATION?

First of all, a clear statement from the board of directors to introduce CISM in the organisation is obligatory.

Then you need:

- A concept, procedures and a budget plan to set up and run the programme
- An involvement from all leaders in the organisation, heads of units, human resources, the Training Academy and the Union
- A CISM implementation- and promotion plan
- A peer selection/election procedure
- A CISM qualified trainer for CISM peer trainings
- The establishment of connections to other CISM programme managers from other ANSPs to get adequate support.





## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A CISM programme consists of different roles of the people involved.

First of all you need a CISM programme manager. Her/his responsibility comprises the management of the whole programme, including budget holding, decision making, leading the CISM teams, organizing a qualified CISM peer training programme, etc.

It is a big advantage if the CISM programme manager gets direct support from the directors of the organization.

Then you need colleagues who want to take over the role of a CISM peer. CISM peers should complete several CISM trainings and then provide peer support whenever needed. They are members of the CISM team and available for early interventions.

In addition, it is good to have a CISM coordinator in each of the different units of the organisation, involving supervisors/watch-and shift managers.

Further on, a good internal and external network of mental health professionals (MHPs), e.g. Psychologists, Doctors, Therapists etc. is needed for referrals if necessary.

## WHAT IS A CISM PEER IN THIS CONTEXT?

Generally spoken in working environments, a peer is a colleague from the same professional field so to say an operational staff member. In ANSPs these are mainly ATCOs.

The strength of a peer-based CISM programme is that peers know the business and therefore, are able to understand CIS within this specific working environment. Another important factor and advantage of a peer-based programme is that in case of a critical incident peers are immediately available to support their colleagues to deal with CIS reactions.

However, an ATCO remains an ATCO. She/he gets a specialised training focussed on CISM interventions, however, not on therapeutic solutions. The specific training therefore, compounds not only multiple intervention techniques but also a clear indication of the limits of the support a peer can offer. Furthermore, in ATM context it is also important to learn to differentiate between the CISM intervention and the investigation of the incident.

Hence, a proper, practical, proven and international recognized CISM peer training programme is essential.

After all, CISM peers require good leadership by the CISM programme manager and every here and than the opportunity to talk to someone about their own emotions related to the interventions. Self care is important for all CISM peers and supervision needs to be offered by the company as a part of the overall CISM programme.



## CISM PEER SELECTION/ELECTION

Finding the right and accepted CISM peers is very much depending on the organizational culture. Is the company open for social support, does the company take CISM interventions as a kind of daily operations, or does the majority of staff members in the company still think that ATCOs are strong enough and don't need support from others?

The CISM programme manager decides, what is the best way to find CISM peers for example:

- Selection: the CISM programme manager builds up a selection process and looks for appropriate persons with special skills to perform this task. Advantage: this procedure is quality-based.
- Election: Peers get nominated and elected by their colleagues. These are accepted persons, trusted by their colleagues. Advantage: this procedure is trust-based.
- Combined steps: Another possibility is to nominate peers, selected by the CISM programme manager for further election by their colleagues. Advantage: this procedure aims to be quality-and trust-based.
- To become a CISM peer requires voluntariness and is a challenge for everyone. Therefore, staff members need to think about agreeing to a nomination. So the CISM programme manager should calculate a certain timeframe for this decision making process. Moreover, it is important to know for a peer what kind of engagement and time it requires to be part of a CISM team.

By the way: this information and communication process can also be seen as a part of the awareness and communication campaign, which supports the acceptance of the programme.

***Finding the right CISM peers is depending on the organizational culture!***

# CISM PEER TRAINING

CISM peer training is a remarkable part of the whole CISM programme. Remember that peers generally are no experts or educated in the field of crisis communication or any kind of social support. As people in crisis need an effective and empathic support when they go through CIS reactions, CISM peers need a reliable training to be able to conduct these interventions.

Therefore, CISM peers should be trained by an experienced and approved instructor, one, who also knows about the special needs for ATCOs.

A validated CISM peer training is ambitious and compounds theoretical and practical parts. It cannot be a one course show, ideally it is based on four interconnected and related courses:

- Individual Crisis Intervention (SAFER-R)
- Group Crisis Intervention (small and large groups)
- Advanced Group Crisis Intervention (Debriefing)
- Strategic Response to Crisis

Each course has a duration of 2-3 days, all four courses should be completed within 18-24 months.

In the meantime and overall, practice in intervention and possibility to exchange experiences is crucial for every CISM peer.

***A proper, validated and certified CISM peer training programme is essential!***

# CISM PROGRAMME ASSURANCE

When the CISM programme is established, the awareness and communication campaign is done, the CISM peers are all trained and first interventions are conducted, your work as a CISM programme manager is going on.

It is very important to stay enthusiastic and keep the programme alive. The programme and the CISM peers need to be visible. Experiences show that it makes sense:

- having every here and then a CISM peer statement in the official communication channel of the company
- running refresher trainings frequently
- providing the CISM peers with news from the field
- setting up an annual meeting with the whole group
- networking with CISM teams of other ANSPs

*A CISM programme needs continuous care!*



# FURTHER SUPPORT

While in process or even after successful implementation of CISM in your organisation you maybe need some more details or you want to talk with a CISM experienced ANSP about a certain topic.

In the ATM community there are several ways to get easy access to support:

- EUROCONTROL experts may connect you with CISM experienced ANSPs
- Joining the EUROCONTROL Safety Human Performance Sub Group (SHPSG) you get in touch with Human Factors and CISM experts.
- IFATCA as well constitutes a supporting CISM contact point.

**Don't be shy, it is pretty normal to get CISM support from other ANSPs.**





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