



National
Guidance

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Off Site Visit Emergencies: The Employer's Role

Many incidents and emergencies that happen on off-site visits will be dealt with by the Visit Leadership Team or the Establishment. However, some of these will become Critical Incidents and require support from the Employer.

Definitions of a Critical Incident:

- 1) An incident which meets any criteria laid down by the Employer's Critical Incident Plan, or
- 2) An incident which goes beyond the coping mechanisms of the Visit Leadership Team and the Establishment.

N.B. It is important that Establishments are prepared and able to cope with all but the most serious incidents that might reasonably be foreseen. Employers should provide Establishments with guidance and training to enable them to be able to cope.

Principles and Priorities

- To meet the needs of the group in crisis.
- To meet and support the needs of the Establishment, its community, Parents, relatives and friends.
- To respond to the needs of other agencies.
- To respond to media demands.

Overview

Employers should have a Critical Incident Plan **covering off-site visits made by its Establishments**. This should be issued to all relevant senior managers and establishment heads/managers. It should comprise an action plan that can be adapted to deal with any given Critical Incident. The procedures within the action plan should be pre-planned, fully documented and supported by an appropriate training regime, specifically designed to ensure that it is properly understood by the key decision makers. It is good practice to test the system regularly and rigorously.

Whereas large Employers such as Local Authorities will have staff who are well trained in incident response, this is not usually the case at establishment level. One way that Employers can support Establishments is by facilitating/supporting scenario-based training for Establishment staff designated to play a role in an off-site visit Emergency. Where small, or single-Establishment Employers cannot maintain the resources to provide an effective response to a Critical Incident during an Off-Site Visit, then they need to find a way to achieve this. For example they could buy in expertise and emergency response cover commercially, or they could explore the possibility of working in clusters with other similar local Employers.

The Critical Incident Plan should be comprehensive, clarifying the roles and responsibilities required to respond effectively to a Critical Incident. It should explain the roles to be filled rather than assign named staff to a particular role (as individual staff may be unavailable at the time of the incident). Guidance for each role should allow any suitable staff to pick up the task and be effective.

The plan must include a clear point of contact to allow any Visit Leadership Team or Establishment to alert the Employer to a Critical Incident. This Emergency Contact must be able to relay the alert to an appropriate senior manager without delay, who should immediately take charge as Incident Controller until able to pass on this role to a more appropriate person. There must then be an effective communication system to allow the Incident Controller to contact colleagues and initiate the Critical Incident Plan for Off-Site Visits. The Incident Controller will need to be able to swiftly create a support group - a Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT). This response team will need the following capabilities, or access to such capabilities:

- decision making
- resource and logistics deployment and planning
- administrative assistance including record keeping
- communications
- media management.

Depending on the nature of the incident, the CIRT will need to be able to:

- gain direct and immediate access to an effective communication system/network that will enable contact with the establishment/setting/group affected as well as with other colleagues and external agencies.
- call upon support and resources at corporate level and possibly among external agencies.
- despatch a Travelling Team with the resources to provide direct support, both at the establishment and at the venue of the group in crisis.

Cooperating Internally and with Other Services and Agencies.

Employers should consider which agencies and other organisations need to be involved in developing Critical Incident Plans, and get them on board in advance. Many Local Authorities will have expertise in this area across a number of departments (such as Children's Services, Health and Safety, Resilience/Emergency Planning, Policy/Planning, Public Safety). The Critical Incident Plan should include contact details for all of the people who may be needed when a Critical Incident occurs.

A key requirement of the Critical Incident Plan is to address the likelihood of the need to work in close cooperation with other services, teams and agencies. It will also need to be capable of giving practical assistance to the wider community affected, as well as providing appropriate counselling and care to all involved.

Alerting and Activating the Plan

The plan must be capable of activation at any time that Off-Site Visits are in progress, including 24/7 and during periods of school holiday. Whether this is achieved by two emergency numbers (covering day time and out of normal office hours) or a single emergency contact number that is automatically forwarded out of office hours is irrelevant. What matters is that the emergency contact number is ALWAYS answered straight away and by someone who knows what to do with the call. The number(s) must be available to all those that may be required to use them, including:

- Anyone who might answer the phone or otherwise take a message (the First Contact)
- All senior managers.
- Heads/Managers of establishments, and their management teams.
- EVCs.
- Anyone acting as Emergency Contact during a visit.
- Visit Leaders.
- Assistant Leaders who may take sole charge of a sub-group.
- Members of the Critical Incident Response Team and Travelling Team.

These people should carry the number(s) at all times during off-site activities, along with an Emergency Procedures crib-card (preferably laminated to ensure that it can be used in difficult environmental conditions).

For the planned telephone communications to remain effective, it is strongly recommended that under no circumstances should Visit Leaders, EVCs, Emergency Contacts, Heads or Managers, make these telephone numbers available to parents – who might otherwise over-burden and compromise the system.

Employer Protocols

On the receipt of an emergency call from a group or Establishment in difficulty, the First Contact should alert the Emergency Contact or a manager, who should initiate the planned cascade of information and action as set out in the Critical Incident Plan. The Emergency Contact or manager should be able to alert the following:

- A senior manager trained in incident response for Off-Site Visits to take command as Incident Controller.
- Any staff whom the Employer decides should be involved in Critical Incident response for Off-Site Visits.
- All staff trained to form part of a Critical Incident Response Team or Travelling Team.
- The relevant Establishment's Emergency Contact and Senior Manager/Head.

- The employer's Media/Communications Team.
- The local Police HQ: i.e. the Police Force of the group involved in the incident.
- Any internal or external organisation identified in the Critical Incident Plan as able to provide support.

Travelling Team(s)

Off-Site Visit Critical Incidents may require support from a Travelling Team (TT) of appropriately experienced staff. It may be necessary to send teams to both the establishment and the location of the incident. The Critical Incident Plan must allow for the formation and dispatch of these teams, WHICH MAY HAVE TO TRAVEL ABROAD.

The role of the TT is to manage support for the Visit Leadership Team including:

- the needs of any injured members of the group.
- the needs of the uninjured.
- the support of relatives who may arrive at the locality, or need to be helped to travel there.
- the interface with other authorities, emergency services and the media.
- the provision of advice and guidance to the establishment and CIRT, so that coordinated support and care plans can be implemented.
- the support of the group when returning to their home base.
- investigating the causes of the incident and preparing a report on return.

The TT may need to be dispatched swiftly. To enable this to happen, prior arrangements should be in place on a permanent basis, thus enabling the TT to incur and meet expenditure, as well as ensuring the availability of communications equipment.

Media Considerations

Experience suggests that there is likely to be intense pressure from the media. This may be directed at the establishment itself, the employer, and the group.

It is strongly recommended that there is control over indiscriminate and potentially damaging use of mobile phones by group members.

It is essential from the outset that reports about any Critical Incident should contain accurate information under the control of the Employer's Media Team.

Saving Lives

Basic first aid is not at all complicated, and many lives could be saved each year if more people knew how to open an airway, place a casualty into a safe airway position and deal with major bleeding/shock. Good practical first aid training is an excellent way to provide young people with a useful life skill while enhancing their self-esteem and self-confidence. It is also an excellent team building/group work activity. It is, therefore, good practice for employers to provide some form of first aid training to all students/young people and staff (whether certificated or not).

Responding to a Critical Incident

- The Visit Leadership Team should stabilise the situation to the best of their abilities.
- The Visit Leadership Team should contact their designated Establishment Emergency Contact.
- The Establishment Emergency Contact should decide the level of response required and, when necessary, initiate the Establishment's Emergency Plan and alert the Employer's Emergency Contact.
- The Employer's Emergency Contact should initiate the Employer's Critical Incident Plan for Off-Site Visits.

The first senior manager contacted should:

- Take on the responsibilities of the CIRT Lead until they are relieved.
- Establish and maintain communication with the establishment and, if necessary, the group involved in the Incident.
- Ascertain the nature of the emergency and cascade this information to all staff required by the Employer's Critical Incident Plan.
- Make some initial decisions about the level of support needed and put in train the formation of a suitable CIRT to provide this. This may need to be physically convened or virtually convened using conference call/electronic solutions.
- Ensure that essential information is obtained, recorded and relayed to allow the CIRT to assess the situation correctly.
- Warn all staff trained for the Travelling Team role to stand by.
- Brief the CIRT as soon as this is assembled (virtually or physically).

