



National
Guidance
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Emergencies and Critical Incidents - Guidance for Employers

See document [4.1b "Emergencies and Critical Incidents – Overview"](#), which includes definitions of the terms 'Emergency' and 'Critical Incident'.

Most incidents that happen on off-site visits can be managed by the visit leadership team. However, sometimes an incident becomes an Emergency, when the visit leadership team requires support from the establishment. See document [4.1d "Emergencies and Critical Incidents – Guidance for Establishments"](#).

Occasionally an Emergency becomes a Critical Incident, when the establishment requires support from the employer (or is required by the employer to involve them, because of the nature of the incident).

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.

If an employer does not have the resources to provide effective support to establishments during Critical Incidents, then it should find another way to achieve this. For example, it could buy in expertise and emergency response cover from a commercial provider, or it could set up a support network with other similar employers. Establishments could also be encouraged to make suitable arrangements to increase their own resilience: for example, clusters of schools could work together to provide mutual support.

Critical Incident Plan

Employers should have a Critical Incident Plan covering off-site visits made by their establishments. It should aim to:

- Meet the needs of the group in crisis;
- Meet the needs of the establishment and its community: young people, staff, parents, relatives and friends;
- Respond to the needs of other agencies;
- Respond to media demands.

The plan should be adaptable to deal with any type of visit or incident.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Critical Incident Plan should clarify 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 them (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.

Emergency Contact

The Critical Incident Plan should include one or more Emergency Contact phone numbers to allow any visit leadership team or establishment to alert the employer to a Critical Incident. These must be available at any time that off-site visits could be in progress, including out of office hours, overnight and during weekends and holiday periods. Any member of staff who might by chance receive a message in the event of a Critical Incident should know how to alert the Emergency Contact.

The Emergency Contact number should always be answered immediately by someone who knows how to respond. It should therefore not be a number that can be engaged for any length of time by other business, nor one that goes to an unmonitored answering service.

Large employers, such as Local Authorities, might have a dedicated emergency line staffed permanently. In other cases, where the out-of-office-hours Emergency Contact might be off duty but on call, they should be:

- Either a senior experienced member of staff who can immediately take charge as Incident Controller;
- Or someone is trained in how to respond to a call, including alerting a senior experienced member of staff;
- Immediately available – i.e. their availability is not dependent upon arranging childcare or dealing with other commitments.

The person acting as Emergency Contact must relay the alert to nominated on-call senior staff without delay, using an appropriate method such as a call-out list, group text or paging.

Incident Controller

The first senior staff member who responds to the alert by the Emergency Contact should immediately take charge as Incident Controller, at least until able to pass on this role to a more appropriate person. There should always be a single person acting as Incident Controller at any time during the incident. They should maintain an overview, and delegate tasks and responsibilities as necessary.

Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT)

The Incident Controller should swiftly convene a support group - a Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT). The CIRT is likely to need the following capabilities, or access to such capabilities:

- Decision making;
- Resource and logistics planning and deployment;
- Administrative assistance including record keeping;
- Communications;
- Media management.

Communications during the Critical Incident

The Critical Incident Plan should ensure that there is an effective communication system. This must allow:

- The Emergency Contact to contact nominated senior staff to trigger the Critical Incident Plan;
- The Incident Controller to contact colleagues to convene the CIRT;
- The Incident Controller and CIRT to maintain contact with the establishment and group affected, as well as with other colleagues and external agencies as necessary.

Alternative/additional telephone lines may be needed – a few mobiles could be kept for this purpose (kept charged and checked regularly to ensure that they are active and have enough credit).

Internal and External Support

The CIRT may need to call upon support and resources from within the employer's organisation and/or from external agencies. The employer should therefore consider who needs to be involved in developing and implementing the Critical Incident Plan, and get them on board in advance. Many Local Authorities will have expertise in this area across several 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 the people and agencies who may be needed when a Critical Incident occurs.

Travelling Team

The CIRT may need to despatch a Travelling Team of appropriately experienced staff with the resources to provide direct support to the establishment and/or at the location of the group in crisis. The Critical Incident Plan should include plans for the formation and despatch of such teams, which may have to travel overseas.

The Travelling Team may need to be despatched swiftly. Prior arrangements should therefore be in place for items such as travel, communications and expenses.

More than one Travelling Team may be needed, for example to support both the group and the establishment.

Responding to a Critical Incident

The first manager contacted should take on the responsibilities of the Incident Controller until they are relieved.

Depending on the nature of the incident, the Incident Controller should:

- Establish and maintain communication with the establishment and, if necessary, the group involved in the incident;
- Ascertain the nature of the incident, ensuring that all information is recorded;
- Make some initial decisions about the level of support needed, and initiate the formation of a suitable CIRT to provide this. This could be convened physically, or remotely using electronic communication
- Brief the CIRT as soon as this is assembled (virtually or physically), and delegate responsibilities/tasks as appropriate;
- Alert other managers/staff as required by the Critical Incident Plan;
- Alert potential members of a Travelling Team.

Depending on the nature of the incident, tasks for the CIRT and/or Travelling Team(s) could include:

- Meet the immediate needs of the of the group, including any who are injured (e.g. safety, first aid, medical treatment; safeguarding, communications, transport, shelter/accommodation, food/drink);
- Keep a log of all information and actions;
- Organise any required resources and logistics;
- Support establishment staff including the visit leadership team;
- Communicate with and support parents/relatives;
- Support parents/relatives who may arrive at the locality, or need to be helped to travel there;
- Liaise with the emergency services and/or local authorities and/or other agencies;
- Liaise with any tour operators and/or travel/accommodation/activity providers
- Liaise with insurers;
- Deal with the media;
- Provide advice and guidance to the establishment;
- Support the group as it returns to its home base;
- Meet the longer-term needs of the group, staff and community (e.g. counselling, practical support);
- Investigate the causes of the incident and prepare a report.

Dealing with the Media

If the incident is serious, there is likely to be intense interest from the media. This may be directed at the employer, the establishment, the group, parents and staff.

It is essential that the press is provided with accurate information under the control of the employer's media/communications officer or other authorised staff.

The Critical Incident Plan should:

- Clarify which staff are authorised to deal with the media, and to post to social media if this is appropriate;
- Instruct all other staff not to give interviews, comments or materials to the media, nor to post about the incident on social media, but to direct any media requests to the authorised staff.

Training, Testing and Practice

All relevant staff should be given a copy of the Critical Incident Plan, and be familiar with it. Staff who may be required to deal with the media should be provided with training for such circumstances.

An effective way of preparing staff to deal with Critical Incidents, and of testing the Emergency Plan and related systems, is through regular scenario training. This should use scenarios which have a realistic likelihood of occurring during the type of visit organised by the employer's establishments. For example:

- A group involved in a coach crash overseas;
- A group involved in a terrorist incident;
- A participant going missing during a visit;
- A fatality during a visit.

For increased realism, the employer could work on a scenario with one of its establishments. This could use the scenario training example given in document [4.1d "Emergencies and Critical Incidents – Guidance for Establishments"](#).

Scenario training could be led by an experienced manager or officer such as an Outdoor Education Adviser, who provides information about the scenario, observes the response and then facilitates a discussion.

One way that employers can support establishments is by facilitating scenario-based training for establishment staff.

OEAP provides Management of Visit Emergencies (MOVE) training for establishment staff – see www.outdooreducationadvisers.co.uk/training.

