TAKE 5 FOR SAFETY

INSTRUCTOR'S NOTES

5-MINUTE SAFETY DRILL

Critical Stress: Ignoring Stress Kills

FOCUS: Stress related illnesses are increasing in the fire service workplace. Stress plays a significant role in strokes and heart attacks. We should give additional priority to addressing this serious issue.

Date:_____

Shift:_____

Dept:_____

Station:_____

Training Code:_____

NOTES:

CHALLENGE

As emergency workers, firefighters are susceptible to stressful situations or events while responding to extreme situations each day. The job requires that we remain productive, and often ignoring the stress that results from the traumatic events that we witness. How can we more effectively deal with the issue of critical stress?

Critical stress affects every firefighter. The effects vary in degree from firefighter to firefighter. Some people have an abnormally high tolerance to critical stress while others have a much lower tolerance. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is one of the common responses to stress experienced by emergency services personnel. Stress can appear immediately after witnessing or being involved in a stressful event or it can occur over a period of time. Some symptoms and warning signs:

- Feelings of tension, anxiety, anger, irritability
- Chronic fatigue
- Chronic neck, back, or head aches
- Change or swings in personality
- Loss of appetite, overeating
- Insomnia
- Inability to concentrate

Frequent debriefing is one of the best practices to prevent and identify critical stress cases. Debriefing is especially important after calls involving a fatality, injury to another firefighter, or calls that are particularly gruesome. Infant deaths, suicides, and the loss of a co-worker are red flag events that should require repeated debriefing. Debriefing sessions should be held close to the time of the traumatic event.

DISCUSSION

- Did you participate in a debriefing session, was it beneficial?
- Do you think denial is a problem that prevents some firefighters from getting help with critical stress?
- Have you observed peers with signs of PTSD?
- How did you or the department work with the individual?
- What are the department SOG's if you think another firefighter is showing signs of critical stress?
- What changes would better help our department deal with critical stress?

The greatest asset of the fire service is our people; protect them

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