



SPUR Meeting Notes: Supporting Rail Employees through Critical Incidents

December 2023

Meeting Summary

An individual's response to a potentially traumatic event depends on many factors including aspects of the event itself, personal characteristics, prior work experience, and any personal history they may bring to that moment. Awareness of this range of responses and experiences is important for ensuring that adequate care is available.

Key Takeaways

- FRA refers to Critical Incidents (CI) as accidents or incidents that result in a fatality, loss of limb or similarly serious bodily injury, or a “catastrophic” accident or incident that could impair the employee’s ability to perform his or her job safely.
 - Other events have the potential to cause trauma including a collision with an unoccupied vehicle, near miss with a pedestrian, collision with debris, or derailment.
- Railroads have Critical Incident Stress Plans (CISPs) in place to manage these types of incidents.
 - Plans should provide enough detail, so they are actionable and specific. Railroads should tailor these plans to meet their needs, such that plans reflect the railroad’s protocols and can be easily followed and implemented.
- Communicating relief from duty after an incident is extremely important. Specify who, where, and how communication will take place, including information about the types of support that are available and how common reactions and symptoms may be managed.
- While many components of CISPs provide support after an event, resilience training is a proactive/protective approach that can help employees to strengthen resilience before a CI occurs to reduce impacts of potentially traumatic events on employees. This may help employees develop fewer or more mild symptoms after they experience a potentially traumatic event.
- Barriers to the successful implementation of CISPs can include the stigma around mental health concerns, willingness to seek help, and privacy concerns.
 - Possible avenues to overcome these barriers could include working to establish a culture that normalizes talking about mental health and asking for help as well as protecting employee privacy regarding diagnoses and treatment.