



## OPERATIONAL MANUAL

# OPS-617 – RESPONSE TO EMPLOYEE-INVOLVED CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Amends/Supersedes: OPS-617 (12/25/2023)

Date of Issue: 03/17/2025

### I. GENERAL

- A. In all situations, the actions of department personnel will be governed by appropriate department policies and legal restrictions.
- B. These guidelines for handling and investigating officer-involved critical incidents establish the responsibilities for involved officers, witness officers, and support employees, as well as responding supervisors and investigators; however, stated portions of the policy also address procedures for any employee-involved critical incident. The department will ensure all personnel responsible for the management of critical incidents receive training on their responsibilities for the investigative process. All personnel potentially impacted by a critical incident will receive training, so they are aware of the investigative process. [11.3.4(e,f)]
- C. Officer-involved critical incidents may produce symptoms of post-traumatic stress, including time and space distortion, confusion, hearing and visual distortion and emotional impairment, including shock.
- D. Any employee whose actions result in the death or serious physical injury of another shall be removed from their current duty assignment pending an administrative review. The employee may be placed in a temporary assignment, if deemed appropriate by the Chief of Police, pending the outcome of the administrative review. [4.2.3]

### II. DEFINITIONS

- A. *Critical Incident* - For the purposes of this policy, a critical incident is generally defined as any incident involving police personnel where death or serious injury occurs and any other serious or complex event deemed by the Chief of Police to fall under this category.
- B. *Employee* - As used in this policy, the term "employee" shall refer to any employee of the Newport News Police Department, sworn and non-sworn, unless otherwise noted.
- C. *Involved Employee* - Any employee who is actively and directly involved in a critical incident.
- D. *Witness Employee* - Any employee not actively involved in the critical components of the incident but may have witnessed, been present, or have knowledge of the incident.
- E. *Support Employee* - An employee without a personal relationship with the involved employee (i.e., related by blood, marriage, roommates, or romantic), assigned at the discretion of the on-scene supervisor based on circumstances and availability of personnel, responsible for monitoring an involved employee and providing support.

### III. PROCEDURE

- A. Responsibilities Following a Critical Incident

**NOTE:** If the involved employee is non-sworn, the first sworn officer on the scene will be responsible for Section III. A. 1. c-e.

- 1. Involved employee(s) shall:
  - a. Immediately take all measures to render the situation safe and provide/summon medical assistance for the injured. [4.1.5]
  - b. Notify the Communications Division of the situation:



- 1) Provide information and descriptions of any suspects still at large.
- 2) Request additional units to assist in protecting the scene, identifying witnesses and detaining suspects as necessary.
- c. Contact an on-duty patrol supervisor.
- d. As time, resources and physical capabilities permit:
  - 1) Secure the area and establish boundaries of the incident.  
**NOTE:** Scene boundaries must be sufficiently large to allow for all appropriate personnel to adequately conduct their investigation and process the scene.
  - 2) Protect evidence from loss, destruction or damage likely to occur before assistance arrives. Ensure any evidentiary items are not moved or, if moved, attempt to note the original locations and positions of persons, weapons and other relevant evidence; and
  - 3) Point out all evidence to first arriving officers/supervisors.
- e. If requested by the on-scene supervisor, immediately provide a brief description of the facts, including events prior to, during, and immediately following the incident.  
**NOTE:** It is the supervisor's responsibility to determine if obtaining a brief statement of facts from an involved employee is necessary. The statement provides information for incident management and the wellness of the employee. (See Section III.A.5.)
- f. Refrain from discussing the incident with anyone except:
  - 1) Departmental personnel assigned to the investigation.
  - 2) The Commonwealth's Attorney's Office.
  - 3) The department and/or personal psychologist, a counselor, the officer's private attorney, or the officer's chosen clergy, as noted in the "Notification of Internal Investigation" (NNPD Form [#442](#)); and
  - 4) When in doubt, consult a supervisor.
- g. Obtain permission from the on-scene commander prior to leaving or being transported to their precinct station or police headquarters (not applicable if the employee was injured and transported by ambulance to the hospital).
2. Witness employee(s) shall:
  - a. Be responsible for assisting the involved employee(s) in rendering the situation safe, providing/summoning medical assistance, protecting the scene, making proper notifications, and briefly describing the facts to the on-scene supervisor. [4.1.5]
  - b. Refrain from discussing the incident with anyone except:
    - 1) Department personnel assigned to the investigation.
    - 2) The Commonwealth's Attorney's Office.
    - 3) The department and/or personal psychologist, a counselor, the officer's private attorney, or the officer's chosen clergy as noted in the "Notification of Internal Investigation" (NNPD Form [#442](#)); and
    - 4) When in doubt, consult a supervisor.
  - c. Obtain permission from the on-scene commander prior to leaving the scene.
  - d. Complete or provide information for the completion of associated paperwork to include IBRs, Axon Standards entries, Commonwealth of Virginia - Police Crash Reports (State Form FR-300P), Workers' Compensation reports, letters of arrest/involvement, or any other reports required by the nature of the incident requested by an on-scene supervisor. Complete these reports prior to the end of duty unless otherwise directed by the on-scene supervisor. [42.1.4; 82.2.1(b)]



- e. Be available for official interviews and statements regarding the incident. Employees are responsible for complying with all immediate, preliminary and follow-up investigative questions as related to incident witnesses, either from criminal or administrative investigators. This is a condition of employment.
- f. If witness employees become the focus of a criminal investigation, their status becomes that of an involved employee.

3. Responding officer(s)

Responding officers assigned a duty at the scene of an incident will focus full attention on that duty or assignment until a supervisor relieves them. Once relieved, they will clear the scene and return to their normally assigned area and duties. If requested by investigators, they shall provide a written report or statement concerning their actions/observations at the scene of the incident. Officers not dispatched or assigned to the scene will continue with normal assignments and will not respond to the scene.

4. Support employee(s) shall:

- a. Accompany the involved employee (i.e., to precinct, headquarters or the hospital), remaining with them until properly relieved.
- b. Act as a calming influence and monitor the affected employee for signs of possible critical incident stress or trauma. If signs of trauma or shock are evident, immediately summon appropriate medical assistance and notify the on-scene supervisor.
- c. Ensure they do not:
  - 1) Interfere with the preliminary investigation in any manner.
  - 2) Discuss the facts or specifics of the incident with the involved employee; or
  - 3) Make any statements that infringe on the privacy of the involved employee or jeopardize the criminal investigation.

5. Initial responding on-duty patrol supervisor shall:

- a. Evaluate the situation, speak with other persons present (sworn and non-sworn) and, **only if necessary**, obtain a brief description of what occurred from the involved employee(s), unless the employee(s) are physically incapacitated and unable to do so.
  - 1) It is the supervisor's responsibility to determine if it is necessary to obtain a brief statement of facts from the involved employee.
  - 2) The statement will only be required when necessary to:
    - a) Obtain pertinent incident facts.
    - b) Ensure employee and community safety.
    - c) Determine the scope of the scene; and
    - d) Direct departmental resources.

**NOTE:** If it is possible to satisfy these needs through other sources such as witness employees or independent witnesses, this statement **would not** be required from the involved employee(s).

- b. Confirm appropriate medical assistance has been summoned/provided as necessary.
- c. Ensure the scene is protected and witnesses identified and detained.
- d. Coordinate the activities of back-up units.
- e. Ascertain the scene status of the involved employee(s) to include their physical/emotional condition, providing resources and accommodating reasonable requests, as needed. (also: [ADM-330 Employee Psychological Services](#)).



**NOTE:** The Crisis Incident Stress Management Team will not be called until after it is cleared by the appropriate division commander (depending on the incident type), and then only if the employee or their acting supervisor requests it.

- f. Separate those involved and any witness employee(s), and ensure they are transported to the nearest precinct or to headquarters as soon as practical unless circumstances dictate otherwise.
- g. Take possession of the involved officer's firearm, as necessary and in accordance with [OPS-110 Use of Force](#).
- h. Ensure the Forensic Services Unit, the involved employee's division commander, the Major Crimes Division, the Public Information Office, the Internal Affairs Division, all Assistant Chiefs, the Chief of Police, and the Crash Team supervisor (if appropriate) are notified.
- i. Ensure a supervisor contacts the involved employee's family to advise them of the incident and post-incident procedures (if there is no injury or hospitalization, the involved employee may do this notification if they so desire). If there is death, serious injury, or hospitalization, personal contact shall be made if possible. If the individual to be contacted lives a great distance away or out of state, the designated supervisor will contact the law enforcement agency in that jurisdiction and arrange for personal notification and transportation if needed (see [OPS-530 Emergency Notifications and Messages](#)). [22.1.5]

**NOTE:** An open line of communication shall be established between the involved employee's immediate family and the designated supervisor to dispel rumors, answer questions and see to any reasonable family needs. If the involved employee is seriously injured and hospitalized, arrangements shall be made to transport the employee's spouse or other immediate family members to the hospital.


- j. Ensure all required reports are completed and submitted as soon as practical, including IBRs, Commonwealth of Virginia – Police Crash Reports, Use of Force Report (or other applicable Axon Standards reports), Workers' Compensation reports, arrest/involvement letters, and any other reports required by the incident nature. Any required reports will be completed by personnel before they end their tour of duty (with the exception of the involved officer). [42.1.4; 82.2.1(b)]
- k. When involved employee(s) are seriously injured and transported to a medical facility, the on-duty supervisor should arrange for a supervisor to respond to the medical facility to:
  - 1) Ensure accurate information is obtained and updated concerning the condition of the employee(s) and is disseminated to members of the family and the department.
  - 2) Ensure responding personnel do not overwhelm the medical facility by interfering with the facility's operation. A separate waiting area for concerned personnel, away from the immediate operational areas of the facility, should be established, if possible.
  - 3) Ensure that departmental or personal vehicles do not obstruct entrances and driveways.
  - 4) Serve as a liaison between the facility and the department for issues surrounding the incident and personnel at the facility.
- l. Evaluate the need for and request additional support from the Public Information Office. Refer all media inquiries to the Public Information Office.

**B. Departmental Follow Up to Critical Incidents**

- 1. The Major Crimes Division is responsible for responding to the incident and conducting the preliminary criminal investigation (except for motor vehicle crashes). In critical incidents involving a police vehicle crash or pursuit, the Crash Team investigators and supervisor are responsible for the investigation. They may request assistance from other investigative units as needed. The lead investigator is responsible for designating an employee to take possession of the involved officer's body-worn camera as soon as possible. [11.3.4(a)]



2. The Internal Affairs Division is responsible for the administrative or internal investigation. Internal Affairs investigators may respond to the scene to observe it firsthand to better assist them in their investigation later. The focus of an internal investigation differs from that of a criminal investigation. [11.3.4 (b)]
  - a. The internal investigation's purpose is to examine:
    - 1) Compliance with policy.
    - 2) Training considerations.
    - 3) Quality of supervision; and
    - 4) Other issues, such as equipment concerns.
  - b. The Internal Affairs Division Commander will ensure the involved employee(s) and witnesses sign a "Notification of Internal Investigation" (NNPD Form [#442](#)) (either personally or through designation) on the incident date.
3. The criminal investigation will take precedence over the internal investigation, and normally, criminal investigators will speak with the involved employees before the Internal Affairs investigators. To ensure the protection of an employee's compelled administrative statement, Internal Affairs investigators will wait until the appropriate criminal investigators have concluded their interviews before speaking with involved and witness employees. The Internal Affairs Division will also consult with the City and Commonwealth's Attorneys prior to conducting interviews to ensure no other relevant factors exist to warrant a delay in the administrative investigation. While information developed by the criminal investigation team may be provided to the Internal Affairs Division, any compelled statements or any fruits of compelled statements developed by requiring police employee cooperation with the Internal Affairs **cannot and will not** be disclosed to the criminal investigative team. [11.3.4 (a,b)]
4. All involved and witnessing employees will be initially treated and questioned as if they were victims or witnesses to a potential crime. Full cooperation from the involved and witness officers is necessary.
5. If the preliminary investigation leads the investigator to believe a crime has occurred, any employee who becomes the focus of the criminal investigation will be given the opportunity to consult with legal counsel if they choose. All constitutional protections will apply. [1.2.3]
6. The Chief of Police will be briefed by investigators as soon as practical following the initial criminal on-scene preliminary investigation. The Chief will consult with the Commonwealth's Attorney to determine a course of action. If appropriate, the Chief may request that the investigation be turned over to an outside agency. [11.3.4(c)]
7. The Public Information Office is responsible for coordinating all media releases as approved by the Chief of Police or designee. If other organizations or departments were directly involved in the incident, the Chief of Police or designee will notify them of pending media releases at their discretion, when appropriate. [11.3.4(d)]

  
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