**Small Group Exercise (Defusing)**

**Fire Crew Fatalities**

After a warm and dry summer in the western US, a series of autumn conflagrations have left fire crews working for nearly a month straight. Many fires have burned out due to running out of fuels as they have burned up to the tree line; others have crept into the increasing wildfire interface with urban areas. Evacuations in some densely populated areas have reached into the three hundred thousand range.

The firestorm in this part of the state is threatening a National Park. Orders are given to spare no expense saving the landmarks and ancient groves of trees that are the park’s legacy. National, state and inmate crews are all working the area to provide a cushion of protection around these areas.

A fire crew of four firefighters is driving around a steep canyon road and loses sight of the rest of their strike team due to heavy drift smoke. Their radio calls are covered by increasingly frantic crews working below telling of a blowup as the fire reaches a stand of dry brush as long as a football field. As they progress slowly down the road, the driver states he is going to stop the vehicle until he gets a visual on the other rigs. The quick moving fire roars up the chimney of the canyon and soon the vehicle is starting to catch fire, burning through some exterior hose. The crew inside tries to deploy their shelters up against the rolled up windows, but have a difficult time. Soon two of the tires on the fire side burn through. Radio calls of “Mayday, Mayday” are answered but due to the fire no one can reach the involved engine. After twenty minutes the first crews are able to reach the still smoldering engine. They extinguish the fire before approaching the rear of the vehicle. When they gain access to the cab they find two firefighters are pulseless and breathless, two are conscious but badly burned over their faces, hands and chests. A ground medic transports these two to a helispot and the victims are flown to the burn center thirty minutes away. The deceased are left in the engine awaiting the fire investigators. Crews first on scene are pulled back to base camp for a defusing.

**For this exercise you will need:**

**Six to eight volunteers (give role-playing cards). Allow each volunteer to read their role and encourage them to “play it real”.**

**Four to five CISM team members.**

**Allow the CISM team members to decide what roles (Lead, Education, Doorkeeper, etc.) they will take.**

**Debriefing should take about 50-60 minutes, and then discuss for 15 minutes or so…**

**Questions:**

**-Anybody you’d “red flag” as needing further help?**

**-What were some of the “normal” reactions expressed?**

**-Was the CISM information delivered adequately? Key terms used?**

**-Anything to add?**

Public Safety Role

Fire Captain

You are the Captain of the first company to reach the burned vehicle and the crew affected was from your ranger unit—you know all of them. Though a fifteen year veteran, you have never seen burns as bad, never have had any of your crew die. You are really concerned about the surviving members, and your immediate company members to the point you deny your own thoughts…until the Reaction phase, when you have a slight “meltdown”, becoming emotional and questioning “Why?”. Your demeanor is professionally calm until this point.

Public Safety Role

Firefighter

Having just joined this crew late in the season, you are eager to do your best so that there is a possibility of you getting hired full-time. Showing emotions and effects of stress are signs of weakness, you believe, so you do your best to mask them. Downplay how bad the scene affected you, and keep saying “it could have been worse”. Try to remain calm when people ask you “how could this have been worse?” Be very interested in the signs & symptoms (Education phase) and ask questions about them. Your demeanor is guarded, but inquisitive.

Public Safety Role

Firefighter

You have a strong, confident demeanor, having been all over the country as a wildland firefighter. You have witnessed this kind of accident before, and are able to cope with the aftermath fairly well. Critical incident stress management was presented at your academy and you have participated in it over your ten years on line. Though saddened over the event, you rally your fellow firefighters to use their coping mechanisms to help themselves now.

Public Safety Role

Firefighter/Paramedic

Arriving on scene first to the burned rig, you recognize that there isn’t much you can do for the deceased, so you take command to get the survivors transported quickly. You do your job well, and the investigation team arrives as you and your crew are leaving. At that point you realize how critical the accident was and you react by being depressed and questioning your actions. This carries on to the defusing you are now entering.

Public Safety Role

Mobile Dispatcher

You were the Dispatcher that tried to obtain a location for the endangered crew. You had direct radio contact with the crew until the fire engulfed the rig. The Incident Commander has reluctantly let you be a part of this defusing—his reasoning is that you didn’t **see** the accident or scene so why should you leave your job? This frustrates you and you voice this during the defusing. You know many of the firefighters in the defusing and are able to help them cope by sharing how you deal with stress.

Public Safety Role

Strike Team Leader

You were in the lead vehicle in the line of vehicles that passed safely ahead of the blowup. You organized two companies in your strike team to turn around and extinguish the fire and treat injuries. You have been a STL for over ten years, but it is the first time that you have ever had an accident on your watch. This causes you to question (verbally in the defusing) if you want to continue being a wildland firefighter. Others will try to help you cope with your emotional decision, but you insist that you are resigning.

Public Safety Role

Firefighter

This is your first fire season. Encouraged by your family and friends, you applied for this job instead of taking a graduation trip to Europe. You like the action and camaraderie of being a firefighter, but aren’t sure if this is what you want to do for a career—you see yourself more in a management role. This accident hits you hard because you are the cousin of one of the transported victims.

Public Safety Role

Firefighter

Having “been there, done that”, this event doesn’t surprise you. For the last few years you have seen a sharp decline in training in recognizing fire conditions. You think this accident could have been prevented and share that in the defusing. You remain frustrated about this until the Reaction phase when you realize that complaining isn’t going to help you or others in the group.