

SAMPLE POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Incident Response & Operator Support

Canadian Mental Health & Trauma Resource Network for the Towing Industry

Some calls stay with you.

Document type	Sample / adaptable policy framework
Intended users	Towing company owners, managers, supervisors and designated support personnel
Status	Working framework — customize to company procedures and applicable requirements

Important: These frameworks are intended as practical starting points and are not legal, medical, psychological, occupational-health, or regulatory advice. Companies should adapt them to their jurisdiction, collective agreements where applicable, existing health and safety programs, and professional advice.

How to Use This Document

- Replace bracketed placeholders and adapt responsibilities to your organization.
- Define who is responsible for after-hours response and who is the backup contact.
- Add your EAP, occupational-health, local professional, crisis and emergency contacts.
- Coordinate these policies with your existing incident investigation, workplace safety, privacy and return-to-work procedures.
- Review the framework after a significant incident and at least annually.

Policy 01 — Critical Incident Response

Purpose: Establish a consistent response when an operator or employee is involved in a call that may have significant psychological or emotional impact.

1. Activation

- Fatality or serious-injury collision.
- Child or young-person fatality or serious injury.
- Suicide, suspected suicide, or another highly distressing death.
- Known family member, friend, coworker, customer or other personally connected person involved.
- Prolonged, graphic or unusually distressing recovery.
- Operator reports significant distress, difficulty continuing, or concern about their ability to safely work or drive.
- Any other event designated by management as requiring enhanced support.

2. Immediate Priorities

- Protect life and physical safety first.
- Notify the designated supervisor/manager.
- Coordinate with police, emergency services, regulators and other authorities as required.
- Do not pressure the operator to provide a detailed emotional account while the incident is unfolding.
- Determine whether the operator is safe to continue working, driving or travelling home.
- Assign a designated person to follow up with the operator.
- Offer access to professional, workplace or community support.

3. Incident Investigation

- Keep the safety/investigation process separate from emotional support wherever practical.
- Focus investigation records on facts, evidence, sequence, contributing factors and corrective actions.
- Do not use the support process as an investigation interview.
- Do not assume that a strong emotional reaction indicates fault or lack of fitness.

Policy 02 — Operator Support & Follow-Up

Purpose: Provide a structured follow-up process after a difficult call without requiring the operator to disclose more than is necessary.

0–24 Hours — Stabilize

- Confirm the operator is physically safe.
- Determine whether they can safely continue duties or travel home.
- Provide practical support such as transportation, relief from duties, food, water or a quiet place where appropriate.
- Provide information about available professional or workplace supports.
- Confirm who will contact the operator next.

24–48 Hours — Follow Up

- Make a private check-in.
- Ask how the operator is doing rather than assuming how they feel.
- Ask whether they need help accessing professional support.
- Review immediate work-related needs and any temporary adjustments.
- Check whether coworkers or dispatch staff also need support.

48–72 Hours — Continue

- Complete another check-in where appropriate.
- Reinforce that support remains available.
- Watch for changes in sleep, concentration, mood, behaviour, work performance or avoidance that may indicate a need for additional support.
- Escalate concerns appropriately rather than attempting to diagnose or treat the employee.

After 72 Hours

- Do not automatically close the support process at the 72-hour mark.
- Continue follow-up based on the employee's circumstances and professional recommendations.
- Document the support provided without unnecessarily recording private clinical information.

Policy 03 — Supervisor Responsibilities

Purpose: Give supervisors a practical framework for supporting operators without requiring supervisors to act as counsellors or clinicians.

Supervisor Standard

The supervisor's role is to notice, check in, listen, protect, connect and follow up.

Supervisors Should

- Ask the operator how they are doing.
- Listen without forcing details.
- Respect privacy.
- Offer practical assistance.
- Check on coworkers and dispatch personnel who may also have been affected.
- Document the support actions taken.
- Follow up after the initial conversation.

Supervisors Should Not

- Tell an operator to 'toughen up' or compare their reaction with someone else's.
- Pressure an operator into a detailed debrief.
- Promise absolute confidentiality where information may need to be shared for safety or legal reasons.
- Diagnose a mental-health condition.
- Treat time off as the only form of support.
- Publicize or casually discuss an employee's reaction with coworkers.

Sample Supervisor Conversation

“I wanted to check in with you after that call. You don't have to tell me anything you don't want to. I just want to make sure you're okay, that you're safe to be here or head home, and that you know what support is available if you need it. We can check in again later.”

Policy 04 — Crew & Coworker Support

Purpose: Create a work environment where difficult incidents can be acknowledged without creating pressure, rumours or unnecessary exposure to graphic details.

After a Difficult Call

- Acknowledge that the incident was difficult.
- Provide accurate information when appropriate and avoid speculation.
- Discourage graphic discussion, photos, recordings or rumours.
- Make private support available.
- Allow coworkers to ask for support without requiring them to justify their reaction.
- Monitor for delayed reactions and encourage professional support where appropriate.

Dispatch and Support Staff

- Dispatchers and staff who hear radio traffic, receive emergency calls or coordinate recoveries may also be affected.
- Include dispatch and office personnel in post-incident check-ins when the event may have affected them.
- Avoid assuming that only the operator involved at scene was impacted.

Policy 05 — Privacy & Information Handling

Purpose: Protect employee privacy while ensuring safety, legal and operational responsibilities can still be met.

Core Principles

- Limit access to sensitive information to people with a legitimate need to know.
- Keep operational/incident records separate from unnecessary clinical or personal details.
- Do not record diagnoses or medical information unless there is a legitimate reason and appropriate process.
- Do not circulate incident photos, recordings, radio clips or personal information unnecessarily.
- Tell employees, as appropriate, what information is being documented and why.
- Follow applicable privacy, employment, occupational health and safety, and records-retention requirements.

Documentation Principle

Document the support — not the story. Record what support was offered, what actions were taken, relevant safety concerns, referrals made and follow-up dates. Avoid unnecessary descriptions of the employee's personal or clinical experience.

Policy 06 — Safety, Escalation & Return to Work

Purpose: Define when a supervisor should escalate concerns and establish a practical framework for workplace support after a difficult event.

Immediate Escalation

- Immediate danger or urgent medical need: call 9-1-1.
- Suicidal thoughts or a suicide crisis: call or text 9-8-8 in Canada.
- Use the company's established occupational-health, medical or fitness-for-duty process when a safety concern exists.
- Supervisors should not attempt to manage an acute mental-health crisis alone.

Return-to-Work Support

- Supervisors manage workplace safety and practical support; they should not independently determine diagnosis or medical fitness.
- Where appropriate and professionally recommended, consider temporary duty or schedule adjustments.
- Consider quieter assignments or reduced exposure to particularly distressing work when appropriate.
- Consider a gradual return where professionally recommended.
- Assign a designated workplace contact for follow-up.
- Review support needs over time rather than assuming the employee is fully recovered after one conversation.

Implementation Tool — Company Setup Checklist

Before adopting these frameworks, the company should define the following:

- ☐ What qualifies as a 'critical incident' versus a difficult call?
- ☐ Who is the primary after-hours supervisor?
- ☐ Who is the backup contact?
- ☐ How will operators access support 24/7?
- ☐ What EAP, occupational-health or professional resources are available?
- ☐ What local mental-health and crisis resources should be listed?
- ☐ How will support actions be documented?
- ☐ How will incident investigation and employee support be kept appropriately separate?
- ☐ How will photos, videos, radio recordings and other sensitive material be handled?
- ☐ What is the escalation process when an employee may not be safe to work or drive?
- ☐ Who communicates with family members, if communication is appropriate and authorized?
- ☐ How will supervisors be trained to respond?
- ☐ When will the policy be reviewed after a critical incident?
- ☐ Who owns the annual policy review?

Company-Specific Contacts

Resource	Contact
Primary supervisor / incident lead	[Name / role / phone]
Backup supervisor	[Name / role / phone]
EAP / employee support	[Provider / phone / website]
Occupational health / designated provider	[Provider / phone]
Local professional support	[Provider / phone]
Emergency	9-1-1
Suicide crisis support	9-8-8 — call or text, Canada

Review & Approval

Prepared by	[Name / role]
Approved by	[Name / role]
Effective date	[Date]
Review date	[Date]

Reference Notes

These sample frameworks were developed using Canadian occupational health and safety guidance and Government of Canada crisis-support information as reference points. Organizations should verify applicable provincial/territorial requirements and obtain professional advice before formally adopting policies.

- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) — Incident Investigation.
- CCOHS — Health and Safety Legislation in Canada: Injury Reporting.
- CCOHS — Individual Critical Event Preparedness.
- CCOHS — Health and Safety Policy: Development and Implementation.
- CCOHS — Emergency Planning.
- Government of Canada — 9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline and mental-health support resources.