

POLICY NUMBER: 29 OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

(includes Policy number 20, Office Behavior and Policy number 46, Critical Incident and Stress Management & Member, Staff and Volunteers 36)

Version No. 06

Established: 2008

Present Version Passed: 9.5.23

Next Scheduled Review: 2024

PURPOSE

The Northern Geelong Rental Housing Co-operative (NGRHC) recognises its responsibility and the importance of providing a safe and healthy work environment to all **volunteers**, staff, renter-members, contractors and visitors of the Co-op. NGRHC recognises that this is an essential component of their duty of care and as such is responsible to uphold this standard.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Define a set of clear guidelines for workplace behaviours for **volunteers**, staff, renter-members and their households within the confines of the NGRHC, including the office, renter-member homes or anywhere official duties are conducted.
- Highlight every individual's duty to enable and maintain, so far as is practicable, a working environment that is safe and without risks to the health of others.
- Ensure that all staff and renter-members of the NGRHC are aware of their responsibilities within the organisation in this regard
- Define a set of clear guidelines regarding Critical Incident and Stress Management (CISM).

RELEVANT CO-OP OBJECTIVES

Housing Registrar Performance Standards for Registered Housing Providers

SCOPE

This policy applies to **volunteers**, staff, renter-members, visitors, and contractors of NGRHC and includes:

- Occupational Health and Safety Guidelines
- Workplace behaviour guidelines
- Critical Incident Management

POLICY STATEMENT

NGRHC recognises its moral and legal responsibility to provide a safe and healthy work environment for its **volunteers**, staff, renter-members, contractors and visitors. NGRHC further endeavours to ensure that its operations do not place the wider community at risk of injury or illness. NGRHC also acknowledges that sometimes critical incidents can occur outside of their control, and in these circumstances NGRHC will endeavour to provide the appropriate response and support that is required for all involved.

Risk to a person's health or safety may arise from a variety of sources, including but not limited to the following:

- Physical environment
- Bio-mechanical (including ergonomics)

- Mental health in the workplace (<https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/mental-health>)
- Property or equipment loss
- Environmental risk

Occupational Health and Safety Guidelines

All properties managed by NGRHC and all NGRHC workplaces will be maintained in clean condition and in good repair.

Any office equipment or furniture which is identified as faulty or unsafe will be repaired or replaced as appropriate.

NGRHC will assess the need for modifications for disability accessibility as required by renter-members or as changes to legislation dictates.

The NGRHC workplace is a smoke free zone, as is similarly, the homes of renter-members which are considered a workplace for visiting staff and contractors.

All staff and renter-members of NGRHC are to be familiar with fire evacuation procedures both in the office and in their homes.

All OHS incidents and injuries are to be reported to the manager, who will in turn determine if that incident is to be classified as notifiable. If so, the manager will notify [Worksafe.vic.gov.au](https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au) by completing an incident notification form. The CoM will also be advised.

<https://content.api.worksafe.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-11/FOR-Incident-notification-form-2019-10.pdf>

Some reportable incidents must also be reported to the Director of Housing, these include:

- Death or serious injury to a household member, guest or other person in a residential rental property
- Significant damage or failure to property or infrastructure systems that may affect a significant number of renters or persist for an extended period and/ or there is probable or actual adverse media coverage
- Material damage or loss caused to persons or property arising from or in any way in connection with carrying out of works or alterations
- Breach of privacy in accordance with Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) and/ or Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)

All incident notification forms are to be kept in the individual's file in the managers office and an electronic copy within the Workcover folder on the manager drive (if relating to Workcover).

Staff and renter-members are encouraged to participate in any training which enables them to identify any hazards, or be of assistance should an OH&S incident occur.

A staff member is to provide basic information regarding the assembly point and office exits to attendees at Information Sessions.

Workplace Behavior Guidelines

No abusive, threatening behaviour, or indecent language will be tolerated in the workplace or renter-members homes.

It is appropriate for staff and renter-members to ask a person to tone down their language/behaviour and inform them why if they are finding it offensive.

If Intimidating or 'derailing' behaviour occurs during a meeting the parties will be asked to leave. Further instances may result in the instant cessation of the meeting. The convenor of the meeting reserves the right to make this decision.

If offensive language/behaviour continues to exist in any situation, the parties can either leave the premises or be asked to leave.

Any abusive or offensive language encountered on a phone call could result in the termination of the call.

Any physical assault or the threat of, will result in the Police being called.

If a staff member or a renter-member should feel unsafe in any situation they are encouraged to have a support person present with them.

Staff members attending to duties unaccompanied should always inform another staff member where they are going and when they are expected to return. If the staff member does not report back at the scheduled time enquiries should be made as to their well-being and whereabouts.

Any incidents should be brought to the attention of the Manager who in turn will notify the CoM. Details should be documented and kept on file.

The CoM has the right to take whatever action they deem appropriate to facilitate the resolution of any dispute or discomfort, considering the options and processes stipulated in the Rules and NGRHC complaints and appeals policy.

EXPLANATION OF A CRITICAL INCIDENT

The term Critical Incident refers to events that are out of the normal experience, which have a stressful impact, overwhelming the coping skills of an individual or group. In some circumstances exposure to a critical incident can result in Critical Incident Stress (CIS). Signs of CIS can include:

- Decline in work performance and overall well-being
- Experiencing distress
- Emotional reactions including:
 - Recurrent thoughts about the event
 - Feeling uneasy or anxious

- Mood changes
- Restlessness
- Feeling tired
- Disturbed sleeping pattern

The Continuum of Critical Incidents and Stress

Extreme – Category 1

- An incident that poses a lethal threat or significant danger to management, staff, renter-members as well as any contractors or visitors to the co-op.
- Examples may include –
 - death of a staff member or renter-member
 - alleged rape or indecent assault
 - major fire
 - serious threats to staff, renter-members, or facilities
 - significant injury to staff or renter-members
 - attempted suicide
 - action in which the media is likely to have a significant interest

Moderate – Category 2

- An event which threatens staff, renter-members, contractors, or visitors of the Co-op in a non-lethal manner, posing no significant danger to the public but has significant implications for NGRHC. This category includes those which:
 - Effect an individual's care, safety and wellbeing (includes sexual harassment, threatened or actual assault which does not result in serious injury, or substance abuse)
 - Have the potential to escalate to a category one incident
 - Result in physical injuries requiring medical attention
 - Involve serious disturbances by renter-members or staff (e.g. fighting, verbal abuse, slanderous allegations, bullying, mobbing and any other destructive behaviour)
 - Requires reporting to the police

Minimal – Category 3

- A category three incident is one where normal work and routine is interrupted, but its significance does not extend beyond the workplace and:
 - Can be dealt with by the people present
 - Has no further implications for the DFFH, NGRHC WorkSafe, or the community.

All Critical incidents need to be reported to the CoM as soon as practicable.

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Strategies

1. **Preparation** of workers for a possible Critical Incident
 - Develop and maintain positive working relationships and morale with all **volunteers**, staff, contractors and renter-members and in the workplace
 - Establishing contact with suitably trained debriefers (Access EAP)
 - Assess the workplace for the potential of critical incidents.
 - Work with staff in developing response procedures
2. **Demobilisation** (Rest, Inform and Time Out – RIT)
 - To take place before the people involved go home or leave.
 - Ensure any immediate needs of individuals are met
 - Summarise the events that occurred, clarify any uncertainties, and discuss any questions or concerns
 - Show care and support and the provision of psychological first aid.
 - Offer information on defusing and debriefing.
3. **Defusing** (Immediate Small Group Support)
 - To occur within 12 hours of the event
 - Conducted by a trained worker (internal or external)
 - Designed to bring the incident to a conclusion and provide information on personal support
 - The aim is to stabilise responses of individuals involved and provide the opportunity to express any concerns.
4. **Debriefing** (Powerful Event Group Support)
 - To occur 3-7 days after the incident
 - Conducted by trained debriefer
 - Provides structured discussion aimed at putting an abnormal event into perspective whilst offering clarity on the event, including causes and consequences
 - Assists to establish a process for recovery.
 - Discussion and information on 'normal' psychological responses to critical incidents, each person's individual experience, memories that may be triggered and methods to manage psychological and emotional responses.
5. **Follow-Up Support**
 - Stress responses can develop over time and individual, short-term counselling may be required by some individuals.

(Workplace Safety – Coping with a Critical Incident.

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/workplace-safety-coping-with-a-critical-incident>)

Part 5 of the OHS Act requires that WorkSafe be notified of all serious workplace incidents. In the event of a critical or notifiable incident, WorkSafe must be called and notified of the incident immediately. Further to this written notification must be provided within 48 hours and the site must be preserved until an inspector arrives and directs otherwise.

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In addition to this, DFFH also requires advice of reportable incidents as outlined in the OH&S guidelines. These include: death or serious injury, significant damage and breach of privacy.

The CoM must also be informed of the incident and any follow up information regarding the circumstances surrounding the Critical Incident. The CoM will approve suitable services to provide debriefing and staff support where required during and following critical incidents.

Where appropriate and relevant, the Manager and/or the Chairperson of the CoM will notify the broader Co-operative renter-members on the nature of the incident and the outcome. In providing this information to the broader membership, the preferences and state of mind of any affected individuals will be kept in the highest regard.

DEFINITIONS

In this policy:

Notifiable	A notifiable event is a serious incident or accident where someone's health or safety is seriously endangered. For the purpose of Worksafe this may be a death or serious injury resulting in hospitalisation.
Critical Incident	Refers to events that are out of the normal experience, which have a stressful impact, overwhelming the coping skills of an individual or group.
Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)	A process that aims to help workers and individuals deal with the emotional reactions that may result from involvement in or exposure to unusual workplace incidents (Workplace Safety – Coping with a Critical Incident. https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyiving/workplace-safety-coping-with-a-critical-incident)
Critical Incident Stress	The range of physical and psychological symptoms that might be experienced by someone as a result of being involved in a traumatic or critical incident (https://www.lifesavingsociety.com).
Derail	Obstruct (a process) by diverting the topic from it's intended purpose
Mobbing	Collective aggression or group bullying in which one or more people covertly attack another; and/or a deliberate attempt to force a staff member out of their workplace because of humiliation, general harassment and emotional abuse.
Risk	The chance or probability that a person will be harmed or experience an adverse health effect if exposed to a hazard.
Risk Assessment	Risk assessment is the process of: Identifying hazards and risk factors that have the potential to cause harm. Analysing and evaluating the risk associated with that hazard. Determining appropriate ways to eliminate the hazard or controlling the risk when the hazard cannot be eliminated.

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Workplace	A workplace is a location where someone works for their employer or themselves, a place of employment. Such a place can range from a home office to a large office building or factory and can include private residences where work may be undertaken by trades or contractors.
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RELATED DOCUMENTS

Security Policy
Maintenance Policy
Asset Management Policy
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Policy
Complaints and Appeals Policy
NGRHC Rules

Legislation and standards

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (OHS Act)
Dangerous Goods Act 1985
Workplace Injury, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013
The Housing Act 1983
Performance Standards for Registered Housing Agencies

Transparency and accessibility

This policy will be available on the NGRHC website www.ngrhc.org.au/policy