

EMPLOYMENT POLICY MANUAL

Subject: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder	Approval Date: January 15, 2018	By-Law No. 02-2018 Amended by 83-2018
--	---	--

3.34 POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

1. POLICY STATEMENT

The Municipality of Red Lake is committed to addressing Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in our workplace. This prevention plan outlines our approach to addressing PTSD and the focus of this plan is to establish working procedures based on the PTSD Framework below. Specifically, this plan highlights our prevention, intervention and recovery and return to work policies and practices. This Policy focuses on the Volunteer Fire Department, however, the procedures and tools are available to all employees of the Municipality.

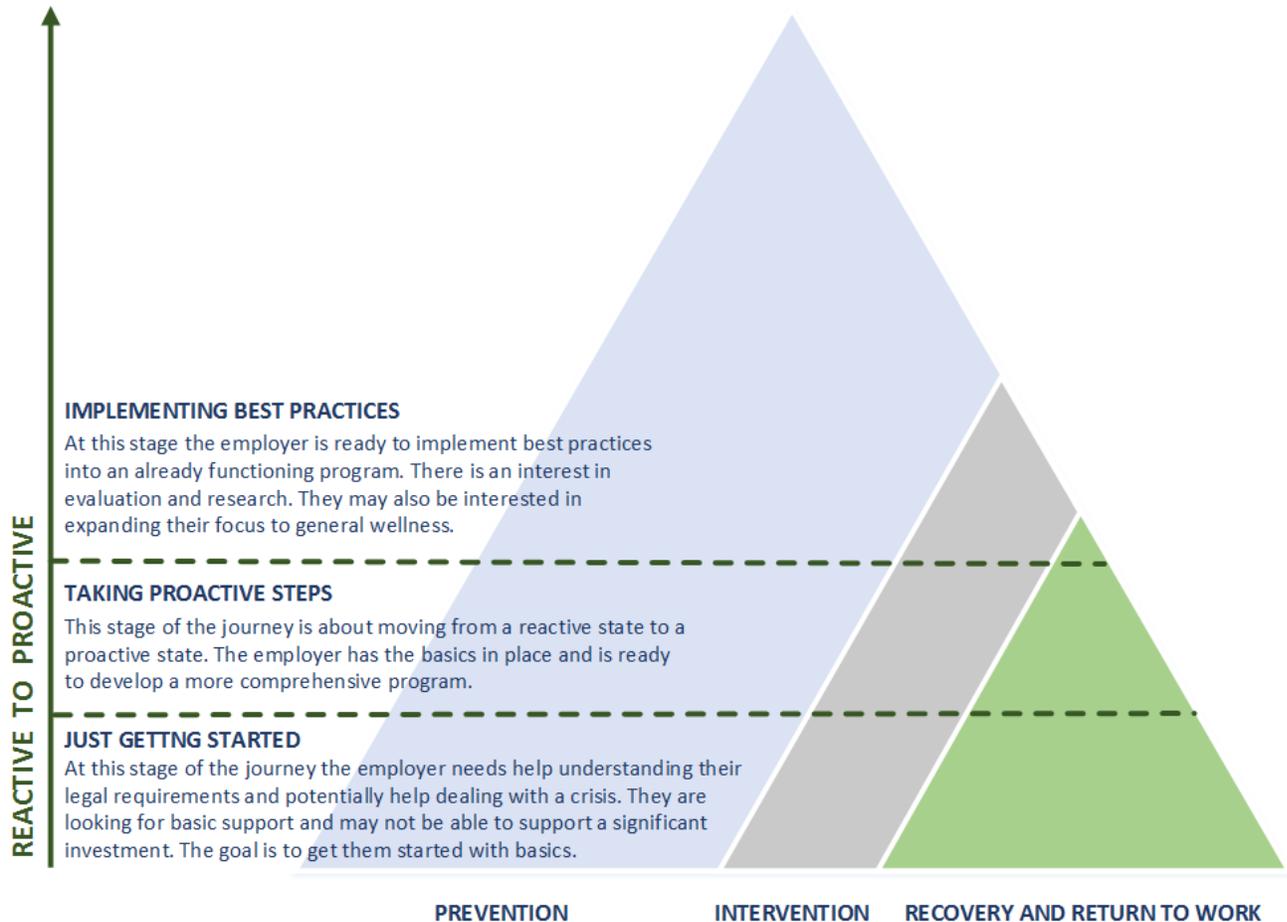


Figure 1: PTSD Framework



EMPLOYMENT POLICY MANUAL

Subject: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder	Approval Date: January 15, 2018	By-Law No. 02-2018 Amended by 83-2018
--	---	--

2. PREVENTION FOCUS AREA

Prevention focuses on outlining the basic elements of occupational health and safety and our legal responsibilities, outlining roles and responsibilities and incident reporting procedures. The goal is to establish or integrate a PTSD prevention program and overall a safer workplace.

3. INTERVENTION

Intervention focuses on outlining actions that can be taken to improve a situation. This includes ensuring that firefighters and employees know how to report psychological injuries when they occur and are supported in doing so. It also highlights intervention options that are evidence based and that can be utilized in organizations.

4. RECOVERY AND RETURN TO WORK OR SERVICE

Recovery and Return to Work ensures that the fire officers and other department heads understand how to accommodate a person who is suffering from PTSD and that there are clearly established roles and responsibilities for support. Recovery and return to work is an important aspect of preventing future or further injury.

5. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the plan is to provide all employees clarity on how the Municipality of Red Lake will address PTSD prevention, intervention and recovery and return to work in our organization.

5.1 The specific objectives of the plan are to:

- a) Define the legal requirements.
- b) Explain how to identify and respond to PTSD injuries.
- c) Establish roles and responsibilities within the organization.
- d) Establish policies and procedures to support PTSD prevention in the organization.
- e) State crisis intervention expectations and screening protocols.
- f) Outline peer groups and intervention practices and procedures so that all employees understand the available intervention options.
- g) Provide examples of policies that may be utilized in the organization to support efficient and effective recovery and return to work.



EMPLOYMENT POLICY MANUAL

Subject: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder	Approval Date: January 15, 2018	By-Law No. 02-2018 Amended by 83-2018
--	---	--

6. OVERVIEW OF PTSD, RISK FACTORS, SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

PTSD can develop when someone experiences, sees or learns about an event involving actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence.

7. CAUSES

It is believed that PTSD is caused by a complex mix of:

- a) Life experiences, including the amount and severity of trauma you have experienced since early childhood;
- b) The way your brain regulates the chemicals and hormones your body releases in response to stress; and
- c) Inherited mental health risks such as an increased risk of anxiety or depression and inherited aspects of your personality or temperament.

8. RISK FACTORS

- a) Having a job that increases your risk of being exposed to traumatic events;
- b) Experiencing intense or long-lasting trauma;
- c) Feeling horror, helplessness or extreme fear;
- d) Seeing people get killed or hurt;
- e) Having experienced other trauma earlier in life, including childhood abuse or neglect;
- f) Having other mental health problems such as anxiety or depression;
- g) Lacking a good support system of family and friends;
- h) Dealing with extra stress after the event, such as loss of a loved one, pain and injury, or loss of a job or home;
- i) Having biological relatives with mental health problems including PTSD or depression.

PTSD can increase the risk of other mental health problems such as:

- Depression and anxiety;
- Issues with drugs or alcohol use; and
- Suicidal thoughts and actions.



EMPLOYMENT POLICY MANUAL

Subject: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder	Approval Date: January 15, 2018	By-Law No. 02-2018 Amended by 83-2018
--	---	--

9. SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Symptoms may start within 3 months of the event but can sometimes not appear until years after the event. The symptoms can make it hard for the affected person to live their everyday life and can be accompanied by depression, substance abuse, or other anxiety disorders. The following are three types of symptoms associated with PTSD.

9.1 INTRUSIVE MEMORIES

Sometimes called re-experiencing symptoms, these memories can start from the person's own thoughts, or can be triggered by words, objects or situations that are reminders of the traumatic event. Intrusive memories include:

- a) Recurring, unwanted distressing memories of the traumatic event;
- b) Reliving the event as if it were happening again;
- c) Upsetting dreams about the event; and
- d) Severe emotional distress or physical reactions (heart racing, hands sweating) to something that reminds you of the event.

9.2 AVOIDANCE

Avoidance symptoms may cause a person to change their routine such as avoiding things that remind them of the event as well as negative changes in thinking and moods. This includes:

- a) Trying to avoid thinking about the event;
- b) Avoiding places, objects, activities or people that remind you of the event;
- c) Increased negative feelings about self or others;
- d) Feeling emotionally numb or an inability to experience positive or negative emotions;
- e) Feeling hopeless about the future;
- f) Losing interest in activities that were enjoyable in the past;
- g) Feeling strong guilt, depression or worry;
- h) Memory problems including not remembering important aspects of the traumatic event; and
- i) Difficulty maintaining close relationships.



EMPLOYMENT POLICY MANUAL

Subject: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder	Approval Date: January 15, 2018	By-Law No. 02-2018 Amended by 83-2018
--	---	--

9.3 HYPER-AROUSAL SYMPTOMS

These symptoms are changes in emotional reactions usually constant and can make a person feel stressed, angry, overwhelmed and “on guard.” The symptoms include:

- a) Irritability, feeling tense or “on guard”;
- b) Difficulty sleeping;
- c) Angry outbursts or aggressive behavior;
- d) Being on constant guard for danger;
- e) Feelings of overwhelming guilt or shame;
- f) Self-destructive behavior;
- g) Trouble concentrating or sleeping; and
- h) Being easily startled or frightened.

10. LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The Municipality of Red Lake understands that we have a legal requirement under the “Occupational Health and Safety Act” to take every reasonable precaution to protect workers from harm. The Fire Chief and Station Officers are required to inform all firefighters about psychological hazards on the job and provide training to employees on how to prevent these hazards and protect themselves from harm. Firefighters are also required to follow policies and procedures set out by the municipality.

11. NOTIFICATION OF INJURY/ILLNESS

Reporting a Posttraumatic Stress Disorder is handled in the same manner as other injuries or illnesses. When an injury or illness occurs, the employer must submit a WSIB Form 7 Report of Injury/Illness.

In many cases, an employee with PTSD will require time off from work, but in some instances, it may be possible to accommodate them with alternate work as they are receiving treatment. The same WSIB Form 7 is used regardless of whether the ill/injured employee loses time from work (Lost Time Injury), or only seeks medical attention (No Lost Time Injury). The employee will be sent a Form 6 by the WSIB for completion following the employer’s submission of the claim.



EMPLOYMENT POLICY MANUAL

Subject: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder	Approval Date: January 15, 2018	By-Law No. 02-2018 Amended by 83-2018
--	---	--

12. ORGANIZATIONAL PTSD PRACTICES

The Municipality of Red Lake considers mental health and psychological safety of its employees to be an important part of a productive, effective and healthy workplace.

To promote a healthy workplace we will strive to:

- a) Increase awareness about mental health issues and create an open dialogue between firefighters, officers and the municipal leadership.
- b) Increase awareness about mental health issues and create an open dialogue between employees, supervisors and the municipal leadership.
- c) Promote principles of mutual respect, confidentiality and cooperation.
- d) Support the psychological safety of our department members and provide them resources and tools to address emotional distress or trauma experienced.
- e) Focus on the health and well-being of all department members, not personal health status.

13. ORGANIZATIONAL ANTI-STIGMA PRACTICES

The Municipality of Red is committed to fostering a workplace where our employees are protected from stigma associated with mental illness. Our organization will ensure that all employees are treated with respect and dignity; this includes those suffering from mental illness.

14. RECOGNIZING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF PTSD

Municipality of Red Lake employees will be trained to know how to recognize and respond to signs and symptoms of PTSD in a coworker. If signs and symptoms are found to be present it is expected that the following actions are taken:

- a) Keep the communication lines open, and ask how they or other department members can provide support. If they are not ready to talk, wait for them to open up. If they do start to share, do not interrupt, it is often difficult for people with PTSD to ask for help;
- b) Deal with signs and symptoms directly and as soon as possible. If signs and symptoms are recognized it is best to open the dialogue and provide support; and



EMPLOYMENT POLICY MANUAL

Subject: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder	Approval Date: January 15, 2018	By-Law No. 02-2018 Amended by 83-2018
--	---	--

- c) Encourage talking to someone they trust about what has happened, this could be other department members, family, friends, or peer groups.

15. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PREVENTION, INTERVENTION, RECOVERY AND RETURN TO WORK

15.1 FIRE OFFICERS / DEPARTMENT HEADS

Fire Officers and Department Heads will:

- a) Participate in training to be aware and ready to address the day to day aspects of PTSD prevention and management;
- b) Learn to understand how to support department members suffering from PTSD.
- c) Identify individuals at risk of PTSD;
- d) Be prepared through training, coaching or other means to engage department members in discussions about psychological health and safety;
- e) Encourage active discussion with about mental health and psychological safety;
- f) Implement processes to report concerns and provide support to those in need;
- g) Help identify control methods that support PTSD prevention such as workplace rotations for highly exposed individuals;
- h) Reduce stigma by participating and encouraging positive conversations;
- i) Understand how to accommodate a person suffering from PTSD;
- j) Actively participate in a coordinated Return to Work process and plan;
- k) Provide information about the options available to address PTSD. Help PTSD victims access support and resources, if they request or need assistance; and
- l) Explain that what they are experiencing is a normal reaction. Provide information about signs and symptoms and when they should speak to a professional or seek additional help.



EMPLOYMENT POLICY MANUAL

Subject: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder	Approval Date: January 15, 2018	By-Law No. 02-2018 Amended by 83-2018
--	---	--

15.2 FIREFIGHTERS / EMPLOYEES

Firefighter's and Employees will:

- a) Participate in training and education about PTSD;
- b) Report concerns and incidents so that they can be investigated and addressed;
- c) Listen to coworkers and encourage engagement; and
- d) Reduce stigma by participating and encouraging positive conversations.

15.3 FIRECHIEF / SENIOR MANAGEMENT

The Firechief and Senior Management will:

- a) Participate in training and education about PTSD;
- b) Learn to understand how to support department members suffering from PTSD;
- c) Identify individuals at risk of PTSD;
- d) Understand how to accommodate a person suffering from PTSD;
- e) Actively participate in a coordinated Return to Work process and plan;
- f) Provide information about the options available to address PTSD. Help PTSD victims access support and resources, if they request or need assistance; and
- g) Ensure the Municipality has partnerships and services in place to support Firefighters suffering from the symptoms of PTSD.

16. PTSD AWARENESS AND ANTI-STIGMA TRAINING

The Municipality of Red Lake will offer an Awareness Training Program so that all firefighters and employees are familiar with the signs and symptoms of PTSD.

17. POST EXPOSURE EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Education and awareness will be offered to those who have experienced a traumatic event. This education will focus on providing information about signs and symptoms, how to access care if needed and provision of contact information if they require assistance and/or resources.



EMPLOYMENT POLICY MANUAL

Subject: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder	Approval Date: January 15, 2018	By-Law No. 02-2018 Amended by 83-2018
--	---	--

17.1 EARLY INTERVENTION

When department members are exposed to a traumatic event, The Municipality of Red Lake will provide the following early interventions to minimize stress and promote prevention of PTSD:

- a) Allowing time off for those who have been involved in a traumatic event;
- b) Provide counselling services to address the emotional aspects of what they have experienced;
- c) Use debriefing sessions that focus on helping put their experiences in perspective and validate what they have seen, done, thought and felt; and
- d) Provide ongoing education that gives information on PTSD, stress management and actions that department members can take for themselves.

18. PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS OR CRISIS INTERVENTION TEAMS

- Community Counseling and Addiction Services 807-727-1100
- First Responders EAP Program – 1-807-387-4765
 - Cite Policy number: 167936, Municipality of Red Lake
- Sunset District Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) 1-807-467-1561 after hours/crisis 1-807-467-3713.