



# Outdoor Risk Management (ORM)

## **Module Subject Matter Area/Topic: Ski Patrollers and Stress Injury**

### **Module Objectives**

Upon completion of this module, the patroller will

- have working knowledge of the three step process for Stress Injury Management; What to know, What to Do, Who to Call
- recognize the signs and symptoms of stress injury in themselves and others (*What to Know*)
- learn the basic steps to be taken to manage and resolve stress injury in themselves (*What to Do*)
- identify resources for additional assistance and support (*Who to Call*)

### **Key Terms**

- Stress - a person's response to environmental demands or pressures.
- Acute stress injury - the result of an exposure to a traumatizing event, also known as a critical incident.
- Cumulative stress injury - the result of repeated exposure to traumatizing events or an accumulation of other life stressors.
- Pre-Incident Education – this module is designed to promote awareness of stress injury
- Post-Incident Self-Care – what you can do to take care of yourself when you experience a stress injury.

## **WHAT TO KNOW**

When a rescue situation tests or overwhelms our ability to cope, our usual stress management mechanisms can falter or even fail. The resulting stress injury is characterized by noticeable distress to the point of impairment to effective functioning. For patrollers the more common PTEs include rescues involving fatalities, severely injured children, other patrollers or people we know.

However, it must be noted that even otherwise routine rescues can result in stress injury. The same is true for first time exposure, as well as repeated exposure to challenging and complicated rescues. Other life and workplace stressors can also contribute to the formation of stress injury.



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Often memories of an event activate a fight, flight or freeze reaction, putting us in a constant state of arousal and anxiety. So, it's important to know that all reactions to PTEs are normal. It's equally important to know that pre-incident preparation and training will develop resilience so that the reactions do not become long lasting.

Stress injury presents a continuum of signs and symptoms. The Responder Stress Continuum © (see chart below or click [HERE](#) for a video) illustrates this quite well. According to its author, Laura McGladrey, "it's a color-coded pain scale".



## RESPONDER STRESS CONTINUUM

READY	REACTING	INJURED	CRITICAL
Sense Of Mission	Sleep Loss	Sleep Issues	Insomnia
Spiritually & Emotionally Healthy	Change In Attitude	Emotional Numbness	Hopelessness
Physically Healthy	Criticism	Burnout	Anxiety & Panic
Emotionally Available	Avoidance	Nightmares	Depression
Healthy Sleep	Loss Of Interest	Disengaged	Intrusive Thoughts
Gratitude	Distance From Others	Exhausted	Feeling Lost Or Out Of Control
Vitality	Short Fuse	Physical Symptoms	Blame
Room For Complexity	Cutting Corners	Feeling Trapped	Hiding Out
	Loss Of Creativity	Relationships Suffering	Broken Relationships
	Lack Of Motivation	Isolation	Thoughts Of Suicide
	Fatigue		

ADAPTED FROM COMBAT AND OPERATIONAL STRESS FIRST AID BY LAURA MCGLADREY | RESPONDERALLIANCE.COM

Green & Ready is where you want to be when you arrive at the hill. Yellow & Reacting is a set of the most common reactions to a PTE. Injured & Orange is more serious. Notice how "avoidance" has progressed to "disengagement", and how "distance from others" has become "isolation". Red is the Critical



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zone. When symptoms like these present, it's time to consider getting professional assistance.

For a more in depth look and to learn more about what to know, take a look at these videos and documents.

### [What Every Patroller Should Know About Stress Injury](#)

#### [Stress Injury Risk for Patrollers](#)

#### **WHAT TO DO**

There are a number of things you can do to prepare yourself for PTEs and to care for yourself and your peers afterwards.

Pre-incident education is a proven way to mitigate the impact of PTEs. Having knowledge of stress injury reactions and risk factors prior to PTE exposure leaves you better prepared to handle the after effects of the event.

#### [Stress Injury Risk for Patrollers](#) ©

A pre-incident education **video** developed by the Eastern Division Patroller Stress Awareness Team (PSAT).

The severity of stress injury can be mitigated by the things you usually do to take care of yourself: exercise, eating well, limited recreational substance use, getting enough sleep. All of these things help you stay, as described on the Responder Stress Continuum, "in the Green" and ready for your next shift on the hill. The more you can do to develop personal resilience, the better. So, work on developing good coping skills and supportive relationships as well as staying physically and emotionally healthy.

Know too that there are things that can work against your staying ready and in the Green: prior unresolved stress injury, concurrent life and workplace stressors, and limited coping skills and support systems.



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A good first step after exposure to a PTE is to assess your level of possible stress injury using the Responder Stress Continuum. If you're still in the Green, great. Stay that way. But if you find yourself in the Yellow, Orange or Red, decide on what you need to do to get back to Green and then make a plan for getting there. Then check your progress at regular intervals.

Having a partner review the Continuum and your action plan with you is also strongly recommended.

As with healing a physical injury, there are things you can do to help yourself heal from a stress injury. A partial list of things you can do to promote recovery and return to green includes sharing your experience with people you trust, gradually returning to your normal schedule and engaging in positive distracting activities. Per the [Mayo Clinic](#), vigorous exercise shortly after exposure is also highly recommended.

And there are things you should avoid doing. Don't try to numb or distract yourself with alcohol or other drugs or by working too much or binging on video games or food. And definitely do not avoid those others who care about you.

Lastly, if you find yourself in the red or when your reactions persist for more than two weeks, reach out to helping professionals, a physician, counselor or faith leader.

### **WHO TO CALL**

Pre-incident preparation is very important. We need to know, as Patrollers, that we can count on our fellow patrollers and our local resources for help, if needed.

Work as a team to watch out for each other. Be a buddy and reach out to your fellow patrollers if you detect in them symptoms of stress injury, especially if that patroller appears helpless without hope or undergoing more risky behaviors. Take specific actions to reach out by going for a run or having a cup of coffee with them to talk things out.



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If you find yourself having signs and symptoms of stress injury, reach out to your Patrol Director and colleagues. Most ski areas have local and county resources, called Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) teams.

If your local area does not have CISM resources, contact these First Responder telephone and text hotlines.

- [CREWCARE Safe Call Now](https://www.crewcare.org) @ [\(206\) 459-3020](tel:2064593020) Serving Emergency Personnel and their families nationwide 24/7
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](https://www.suiceline.org) @ [\(800\) 273-8255](tel:8002738255) Free and confidential support for people in distress 24/7
- [International Critical Incident Stress Foundation](https://www.cismfoundation.org) @ [\(410\) 313-2473](tel:4103132473) Referrals to a CISM team for emergency workers in distress 24/7

If you, or someone you know, is experiencing a behavioral health emergency, call **911** or the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at **800-273-8255**.

If your employer has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), consider contacting it. EAP services are strictly confidential and should not report user names to the employer.

Some areas have faith leaders or health care providers that specialize in stress injury management.

### TAKE AWAYS

It can happen to you. Any rescue can be a potentially traumatizing event. So, learn to recognize stress injury in yourself and your fellow-patrollers.

Stress injury is like any other injury you may suffer. Reactions may vary and can be unpredictable, but they are normal and to be expected. The vast majority of injured patrollers will heal and return to their pre-incident status within 1 to 3 weeks. Pre-incident training and planning can help prevent longer lasting stress reactions or PTSD in yourself and your fellow patrollers.

You do not have to be alone. When stress injury happens to you, or someone you know, take action.

### Module Scenario: Self-Assessment

Using the [Responder Stress Continuum](#) take a few minutes to evaluate where you are right now. Are you in the Green and Ready? Or, due to patrolling or other life stressors, do you find yourself in the Yellow, Orange or



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Red / Reacting, Injured or Critical? If so, what action can you take to help yourself return to Green?

Then, again using the Stress Continuum, take some time to recall a traumatizing event you may have experienced, either patrolling or in everyday life. Did the experience move you beyond the Green? If so, what reactions can you recall? And, most importantly, what did you do to help yourself regain your balance and return to Green?

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