

MANAGING THE IMPACT OF SERIOUS INCIDENTS

How can air navigation service providers and other aviation organisations help and manage staff involved in serious incidents and accidents? **Robin Gurt** shares the experience at skyguide of the management of serious incidents.

Serious incidents or accidents in aviation do not only draw the attention of the public and official investigation bodies. They usually also have an emotional impact on the ones that are involved, including controllers, pilots and other aviation professionals. While management and staff of the organisation concerned might be dealing with external pressure, they should not forget to care about the individuals most affected by the occurrence. In times of stress, it is always good to have a structured process that helps the individuals as well as the organisation to cope with an incident that just happened. In 2013, skyguide therefore introduced the 'Management of Serious Incidents' (MOSI) process, which has three goals:

- Ensure a fair and harmonised treatment of all cases.
- Rebuild trust and relationships between the concerned parties.
- Respond to media and political pressures in a credible manner.

The first consequence of initiating MOSI is that the involved controller is withdrawn from operational duty. The purpose of doing this is to protect the concerned individuals (including cognitive, emotional and physical impacts), the company, and those served by the company. The process involves appointing a case coordinator, who acts as point of contact for all involved and interested internal stakeholders. In times of crises, it is very important to relieve as much pressure from front-end actors as possible. In order to reduce psychological impact, the controller concerned must get in contact with a critical incident

stress management (CISM) peer. The intervention itself is not mandatory but the contact with the peer is. The experience shows that usually there is a conversation between the controller affected and the peer, which helps to reduce first stress reactions.

As a next step, the controller has the possibility to review the incident with the recordings available (e.g., radar and voice) in order to understand what happened and to prepare him- or herself for the debriefing that follows afterwards. The debriefing involves the line manager, involved persons and safety experts. It aims to get a common understanding of the case, share experience, and – most importantly – to care for the controller involved and to decide how to move on. One decision can be to reintegrate the controller straight away or to assist reintegration with accompanying measures such as coaching or simulator training. If reintegration is not possible for the time being, the case may be escalated to the next higher level for further clarification and decision.

Usually the process can be closed with reintegration 48 hours after the process has been launched. Even though there is always some uncertainty for a controller after a serious incident, the process provides guidance and next steps. This helps the individual as well as the company to cope with a serious occurrence that might have had an emotional impact. Since its introduction, MOSI was launched more than 40 times. Importantly, the process is accepted among staff to deal with serious incidents on the individual level. **5**

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