

# HELPING YOU THROUGH A CRITICAL INCIDENT

*A resource guide for workers  
and their families*





## WORKSAFENB CARES ABOUT YOU AND YOUR FAMILY.

A serious injury or death of a loved one can leave you in shock or feeling overwhelmed – we want you to know that support and advice is just a call away. This guide is meant to provide helpful information as you grieve and struggle to adjust after a critical incident, such as a life-altering injury or a workplace fatality. You will have many questions – we hope to answer some of those questions here, as well as identify some of the services and resources available to help you cope.

### Critical incident

Critical incidents are traumatic events, causing strong emotional feelings and reactions that affect a person's normal coping abilities, either at the time of the incident or later. This could be witnessing or learning your loved one was in a severe workplace incident or fatality. It is quite common for people to experience emotional aftershocks following a traumatic event. These emotional aftershocks (or stress reactions) can appear immediately after the event, or appear hours or days later, and may last a few days, weeks, months, or longer. Common signs and symptoms of an emotional aftershock or stress reaction may include:

- Headaches
- Confusion
- Nightmares
- Insomnia
- Guilt
- Grief
- Irritability
- Agitation
- Intense anger
- Increase or loss of appetite

### WorkSafeNB

WorkSafeNB is committed to promoting healthy and safe workplaces for New Brunswick's workers and employers. While our priority is preventing workplace injuries and occupational disease, we provide comprehensive rehabilitation services and fair compensation benefits when incidents do occur.



## How can WorkSafeNB help?

WorkSafeNB offers various services and types of compensation if you or a loved one is seriously injured or killed in a workplace accident.

If you are injured at work and your claim is accepted, WorkSafeNB will usually:

- Pay for 85% of your net lost wages if off work due to the injury (loss of earnings benefits).
- Pay for medical treatment and health-care expenses related to the injury.
- Oversee your recovery and work with the health-care providers to arrange treatment and return-to-work programs.

If your work injury results in the permanent loss of use of any body part, you may (in addition to your loss of earnings benefits) be entitled to a lump sum award based on your level of impairment.

If you are the spouse or dependant of a worker who is killed at the workplace or dies from an occupational disease, you may be entitled to benefits. You must apply within six months from the date of the accident for your claim to be assessed. These benefits may include:

- Funds to cover burial and grieving expenses
- Spousal benefits
- Benefits for dependent children

WorkSafeNB may contact you to gather additional information and to communicate a decision on your claim if you have submitted an application for benefits.

## What is WorkSafeNB's role in the event of a serious workplace injury/incident?

WorkSafeNB is mandated to enforce the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and its regulations. The *OHS Act* was established to help protect workers from workplace injury and illness.

Under the *OHS Act*, the employer must contact WorkSafeNB immediately after a worker is critically injured or killed at work. Generally, an investigation begins right away and is carried out by a specialist in incident investigations (investigations officer) to determine the causes and contributing factors to the incident and identify any violations of the *OHS Act* and regulations. Investigations also identify corrective actions and preventive measures to help avoid similar incidents. These investigations can take up to a year to complete.



Once the investigation is complete, WorkSafeNB's legal counsel assesses whether charges are appropriate against workplace parties such as employers, or workers. If charges are deemed appropriate, WorkSafeNB provides their report and recommendations on charges to the Crown prosecutor's office. Charges must be laid within two years from the incident date.

WorkSafeNB will not discuss the details of its investigation, except as required or permitted by law, before charges are laid.

When fatalities occur, WorkSafeNB will provide a copy of the report to the Office of the Chief Coroner. The Chief Coroner may hold an inquest.

### **How can an investigations officer help the victim and the family?**

As mentioned above, serious injuries and workplace fatalities can be traumatic to the victim and the family. Soon after the investigation begins, an investigations officer will contact the injured worker and/or the family to explain the process. Due to the nature of these incidents, confidential grief counselling services are available to family members on an interim basis. The officer will provide the family with contact information of the agency providing the service. An initial set of counselling sessions is provided at no cost to family members; however, ongoing counselling becomes the individual's responsibility.

### **When are WorkSafeNB's investigation findings available?**

When the investigation is complete and a decision on charges is made, the investigations officer will debrief the family on the findings. During the debriefing, the officer reviews the report and answers any questions. A copy of the report can be provided after the case is concluded and following a review by WorkSafeNB's privacy officer to remove any confidential information from the report. Contact the investigator to request a copy.


### **If charges are laid, will WorkSafeNB advise me of the court date?**

The investigations officer will advise the family of court dates, if you or your family members choose to attend the proceedings.

Court proceedings are under the control of the Crown prosecutor. Questions about court proceedings should be directed to the Crown prosecutor assigned to the case. The investigations officer will provide the Crown prosecutor's contact.

### **Can the worker or family sue?**

WorkSafeNB was established to compensate workers and their families when a worker is injured or killed at work. It is a no-fault insurance system. This means that, generally, neither



the worker nor the family can sue the employer and expect additional compensation over and above what is provided for under the *Workers' Compensation Act*.

### **Office of the Workers' Advocates**

Toll Free: 1 844 530-0282

dpetlinfo@gnb.ca

### **What if the media calls?**

The media sometimes reports on a workplace fatality or serious injury. Members of the media may contact you, your family or friends for a comment.

Here are some helpful tips in dealing with the media:

- You do not have to speak to the media if you do not want to. Simply tell them that you have no comment.
- If you choose to speak to the media, you may want to appoint a spokesperson, such as a family member or friend.
- Always ask for the journalist's name and what media outlet they represent. Take their contact numbers.
- Do not bow to pressure. Feel free to tell the reporter that you will call them back if you are feeling rushed, if you are not ready to talk, or if you've changed your mind and no longer want to speak to them.
- Be firm about what you do and do not want to discuss. Talk with your family members and be extremely clear as a family about what is okay to say publicly.
- Avoid speculation or guessing. Be clear with your answers.
- If you are not comfortable with the question, do not answer it.

### **Tips for coping with trauma and grief**

There will be many moments of intense sadness, anger and frustration. Focus on the steps you choose to take each day – small or large, few or many – that will move you forward.

The majority of individuals experiencing acute stress disorder recover completely. If the disorder lasts more than four weeks, you should consult a physician as you may be at risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Traumatic events can lead to either acute or post-traumatic stress disorders. If a psychologist or psychiatrist diagnoses the injured worker with a stress-related disorder, they may be eligible for compensation benefits. For more information about making a claim, contact 1 800 999-9775.



Please know that others have shared similar journeys, and that many people are concerned and care about your well-being. We hope this guide helps you on your journey.

- After a critical incident in a workplace, participate in any debriefing services offered.
- Consult with various resources available through your employer’s Employee Assistance Program, your family physician, your local community mental health services or pastoral services.
- Structure your time and keep busy. Make lists of things that you have to do.
- You are normal and having normal reactions. Do not label yourself as crazy or weak.
- Talk to people. Reach out. Ask for help - those friends who said “Let me know what I can do” really meant it.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible, including sleep.
- Spend time with others; do not isolate yourself.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Realize that those around you may also be experiencing stress.
- Give yourself permission to feel your emotions and share your feelings with others.
- Avoid making major decisions for a while, but do make as many daily decisions as possible that will give you a feeling of control over your life.
- Do not try to fight recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks – they are normal and will decrease over time and become less painful.
- We encourage you to contact Threads for Life, a charitable organization dedicated to supporting families after a workplace fatality, life-altering injury or occupational disease. Their programs can offer:
  - A personal connection to a trained Volunteer Family Guide to facilitate experience sharing.
  - An opportunity for families to meet each other and create communities of support at the family forums.
  - Links to professional support services.
  - Advisory support regarding the workplace investigation and inquest process.



## HELPFUL RESOURCES

### **WorkSafeNB**

Please contact us, if you have concerns or questions.

1 800 999-9775

service@ws-ts.nb.ca

### **Office of Chief Coroner**

[gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/services/services\\_renderer.14198.Coroner\\_Services.html](http://gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/services/services_renderer.14198.Coroner_Services.html)

Email: [DPS-MSP.Information@gnb.ca](mailto:DPS-MSP.Information@gnb.ca)

### **Threads of Life**

[threadsoflife.ca](http://threadsoflife.ca)

1 888 567-9490 (toll-free)

Email: [contact@threadsoflife.ca](mailto:contact@threadsoflife.ca)

### **NB Funeral Directors and Embalmers Association**

[nbfuneraldirectors.ca](http://nbfuneraldirectors.ca)

Email: [nbfdandea@outlook.com](mailto:nbfdandea@outlook.com)

### **The College of Counselling Therapists of New Brunswick**

[cctnb.ca](http://cctnb.ca)

506 854-9345

Email: [info@cctnb.ca](mailto:info@cctnb.ca)

*WorkSafeNB acknowledges the valuable contribution of Threads of Life in developing this guide. Threads of Life is a charitable organization dedicated to supporting families after a workplace fatality, life-altering injury or occupational disease.*