



MINISTERO
DELL'INTERNO

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Psychological stress prevention in fire-fighters



Adaptive responses of fire-fighters
subject to psycho-physical stress

Stress prevention

The aim is to safeguard operators' mental health.

It can be achieved through the **management** of post-traumatic stress disorders, their **prevention** and the **direct involvement** of rescue operators.

Integrated system of social-medical intervention for fire-fighters

- Psycho-aptitudinal tests,
- Courses on psycho-social and work risks
- Enhancement of work organization and premises
- Operators psychological support in case of traumatic event on duty, with critical emotional impact

Regulatory framework

- Law Decree 81/2008
- Directive of the President of the Council of Ministers, June 13, 2006. “General criteria for psycho-social interventions in case of catastrophes”.
- Directive of the Department for Civil Service, March 24, 2004. “Measures aiming at enhancing organizational well-being in Public Administration”.
- European Agreement on stress at work (Oct. 10, 2004) (CES – European Trade Unions; UNICE- European Employers’ Federation ”; UEAPME – European Association of Handicrafts and PMI; CEEP – European Association of General Economic Interest and Related Undertakings)

Regulatory framework

- Interconfederal Agreement, June 9, 2008, for the transposition of the European framework agreement
- Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, General Directorate for Safety at Work, Circular Letter n. 23692, Nov.18, 2010.
- Interregional technical coordination for prevention at work, guidelines for risk management and surveillance for work related stress, Jan.2012
- Permanent Commission for psychological support to Fire Service operators involved in traumatic events and prevention of psychophysical disorders in fire-fighters – Ministerial Decree n. DCF 25, March 31, 2009

Reference models

- Peer-to-peer support programmes
- CISM programme
- Support and care programmes, provided to workers by health institutions and agencies.

Peer support programmes

- *The Open Line* (Magazine of The Western States Hostage Negotiators), by Dell Hackett
- *Peer Support Guidelines* Ratified by the IACP Psychological Services Section, Boston, Massachusetts, 2006
- *Peer Support Resource Manual 2001* - British Columbia Ministry of Health, Adult Mental Health Policy Division
- *Peer Support Job Description* - Canadian Mental Health Association SDG/Prescott-Russell Branch (February 11, 2000).

Peer support programmes

- *Mental Health and Psychosocial Support: Checklist for Field Use.* Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). Geneva, 2008.
- *Peer Worker Position Discussion Paper.* Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) of ACT Teams. Dec. 2001.
- *Peer Support and Employment Across the Mental Health System - Section 3.1.6 § Dec. 2002 - The Champlain District Mental Health Implementation Task Force.*

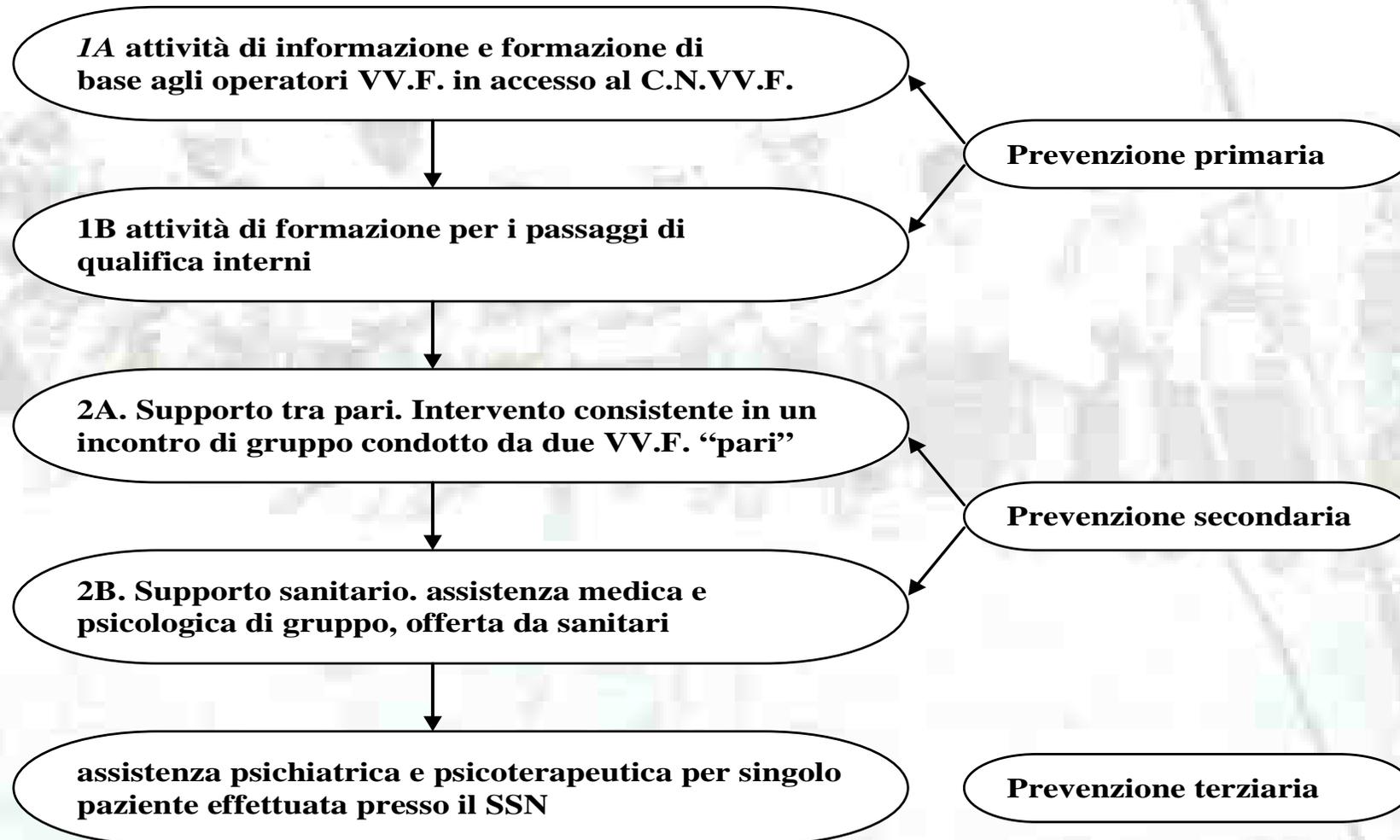
CISM programme

- Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) is the structured assistance to manage critical incident stress. It provides for both the intervention of a coordinated team of mental health professionals and peer-to-peer support.

Institutional Support Programmes

- Municipal Police of Florence - *Il cerchio blu* (*The blue circle* – peer support programme)
- Italian Army – psycho-social training programme aiming at managing emotional and social problems - support interventions are carried out by physicians and psychologists in case of critical events.
- Carabinieri (Army Police)- didactic-experiential programme at the Centro di Psicologia Applicata per la Formazione dell'Arma dei Carabinieri, aiming at developing a basic psychological know-how - In case of post-traumatic stress disorders the assistance is provided by Carabinieri physicians and psychologists.
- State Police – pool of psychiatrists e psychologists – also peer-to-peer support
- ENAV flight control agency - peer-to-peer support

Integrated intervention system for fire-fighters



Integrated medical intervention system for fire-fighters

Primary prevention

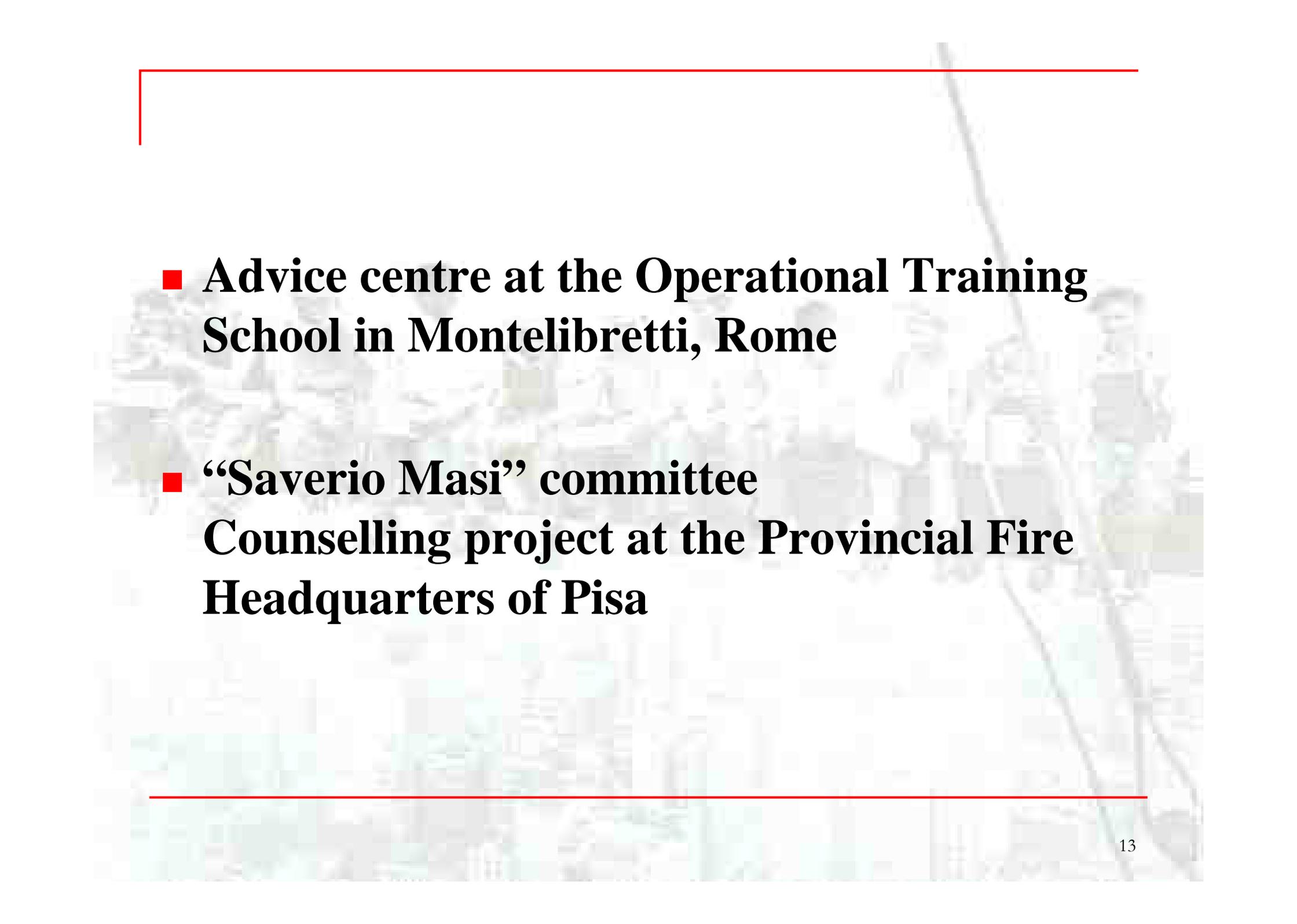
- 1 A – information and basic training during the junior Fire-Fighter course
- 1 B – didactic courses for fire-fighters advancing in career

Secondary prevention

- 2 A – peer support. It consists of group meetings led by two FF peers
- 2 B – psychological and medical assistance provided by FF medical staff

Tertiary prevention

- 3 – individual psychiatric or psychological therapy provided by the National Health System
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- **Advice centre at the Operational Training School in Montelibretti, Rome**
 - **“Saverio Masi” committee
Counselling project at the Provincial Fire Headquarters of Pisa**

2/A Peer support

- In the Italian National Fire&Rescue Service there is no official rank for psychologists.
- A continuous, clinic psychological assistance may transform any highly emotional event into a medical problem
- The “peer” does not replace the psychologist or the psychiatrist, but carries out a first intervention of psycho-social support

2/A Peer support

- To be a member of the same organization enables the peer to accept and share emotions and distress (proximity)
- The peer is a “bridge” between colleagues and physicians/psychologists (continuity)
- The peer can detect risk situations before these become clinically evident (timeliness)
- The peer employs simple techniques: listening, assessment and support

Critical aspects

- Peers recruitment/selection: only volunteers, but must comply with well-defined selection criteria
 - Training of peers through a specific experiential course
 - Eligibility evaluation provided by mental health professionals
 - Continuing education courses and regular evaluation
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Competence

- To know the organization principles of psycho-social assistance in case of emergencies;
- To collect necessary data concerning the context of the critical event;
- To provide a first support to involved colleagues;

Competence

- To listen to the witnesses and meet the support needs of operators involved in the critical event, organising brief and informal meetings, characterised above all by empathetic and participative listening;
- To play a liason role and provide logistics assistance when the intervention of the medical task-force is required;

Competence

- To introduce colleagues to the possibility of attending voluntary support gatherings, defining scope and procedures, as well as ensuring the confidentiality of information
- To plan logistics and organisation of groups requiring peer support

Profilo di competenza

- To lead the support groups together with another FF peer;
- To organise information meetings with local FF personnel apart from the occurrence of a critical event, in order to provide adequate and correct information;

Carried out interventions

Interventions carried out by the psycho-social support team of the Italian National Fire&Rescue Service

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
8	5	12	8	11	9	5	8	7