



Actors add weight to child search test

Eoin English

Actors playing distraught relatives helped test emergency services to the limit during the first major Child Rescue Ireland (CRI) alert exercise in the Cork region.

The actors, who played the roles of a frantic mother and aunt of two children who had been taken without permission by their father, interacted with gardaí and Civil Defence units as they coordinated a detailed search of a vast exercise area east of the city.

Exercise director, Inspector Finbarr O'Sullivan, who oversaw the dramatic test in the Little Island area, said the actors added extra realism to their exercise.

"It proved very successful as it highlighted the actual trauma related to such an incident. It brought home to the searchers the human element behind the scenes of these types of incidents," he said.

It is hoped that adding this extra dimension to the exercise will prepare the various emergency services for the tough scenarios they could encounter if a CRI alert is activated in this region.

The alert system, launched in May 2012, is only used when there is a suspicion a child has been taken without consent, and where a risk to the child's safety or welfare is feared, and if gardaí believe the public can help in the search.

Gardaí issued information such as the name and description of the missing children and the adults they are with, as well as details on how they might be travelling, or where they were last seen.

They use several channels of communication, including print, radio, TV, social media and electronic road signs on motorways to broadcast the message.

The alert is updated and maintained on a regular basis until the children have been found.

There have been several CRI alerts since 2012 but it is used as sparingly as possible to maximise its impact when needed.

The first alert under the new system was issued in July 2013 after Eoghan Chada, 10, and his brother Ruairi, five, disappeared while in the care of their father Sanjeev Chada, 44, in Carlow town.

The boys' bodies were found in the boot of his car near Westport, Co Mayo, the next day. Mr Chada has since pleaded guilty to murder and has been jailed for life.

The joint exercise in Cork was undertaken by An Garda Síochána and the National Civil Defence units to test call-out and deployment procedures and protocols, to test search members and teams leaders, and to ensure that if a CRI alert is triggered in this part of the country, the agencies can work together smoothly.

About 100 people were involved in the event, which also involved the HSE National Ambulance Service, members of the Cork City and County Fire Service, the Port of Cork, the Coast Guard, Kerry Mountain Rescue and Irish Search Dogs, and specialist garda units, members of the Garda Missing Persons office and press officers.

Defence Minister Simon Coveney visited the exercise site and saw first-hand how the agencies respond to such incidents.

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A garda interviews 'family members' in yesterday's exercise. Picture: Denis Minihane