## To: All City and County Managers

## All Civil Defence Officer’s

## All Assistant Civil Defence Officer’s

## Civil Defence Circular 04/2014

**Civil Defence Policy on Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)**

* Background

During their involvement with Civil Defence, volunteers may be exposed to terrible, awful, grotesque, frightening events such as accident scenes. Even for experienced emergency personnel, exposure to such incidents can give rise to Critical Incident Stress (sometimes called ’traumatic stress’). This is a normal, but painful, response of normal healthy people to an abnormal event. Symptoms can be physical, emotional, cognitive and/ or behavioural. Most people recover from Critical Incident Stress and remain healthy and productive. However, in some cases the normal Critical Incident Stress may turn into a much more serious problem called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD requires professional treatment. This document sets out the procedures in Civil Defence for dealing with Critical Incident Stress.

* CISM Awareness Training

It is Civil Defence policy that all volunteers attend CISM awareness training. This will form part of the induction for new volunteers. Existing volunteers should also receive CISM training. CISM awareness training is delivered locally by the CDO or by a designated volunteer who has completed a CISM course run by the Civil Defence College. A standard presentation for use in CISM awareness training has been prepared by the Civil Defence Branch.

* CISM training for CDO’s and nominated volunteers

A 4 day course on CISM was delivered in 2013 and in 2014 to most CDO’s and to some volunteers at the Civil Defence College. This course will be repeated in 2015. It is intended that at least one volunteer from each Civil Defence Unit will receive this CISM training. After completing this training, these volunteers will act as ‘peer to peer’ supports to any member of their Unit who has concerns about CISM. They will also be able to deliver CISM Awareness Training and conduct defusing.

* Defusing

After dealing with a Critical Incident, such as attendance at an accident scene or recovery of a body, the CDO or senior officer at the scene must arrange for an appropriate defusing for all volunteers. Ideally the defusing should take place within 3-4 hours of the incident. Defusing involves gathering the volunteers away from the scene of the incident and allowing volunteers express any concerns they have about their involvement in the incident. Particular care should be taken with younger and less experienced volunteers. A guide to Critical Incident defusing is attached to this document.

* Debriefing

If the incident is particularly serious (for example involving multiple fatalities) a formal debriefing of all volunteers should be organised. The formal debriefing is led by a specially trained team. This is in addition to the defusing. Ideally the debriefing should take place within one to ten days of the incident. If a debriefing is required, the Civil Defence Branch in Roscrea should be contacted and they will arrange for the Defence Forces CISM Team to conduct the debriefing.

* Death/ Serious injury of a volunteer

If a volunteer dies or is seriously injured during any Civil Defence activity the Civil Defence Branch must be contacted immediately. Contact details are available on the Civil Defence website. The Defence Forces CISM Team will be deployed to support the members of the Civil Defence Unit.

* Carecall

Civil Defence has a contract in place with the Carecall counselling service to support volunteers who are experiencing issues relating to their involvement in Civil Defence. This counselling will not deal with non Civil Defence issues such as relationship or financial difficulties. Carecall counselling is available free of charge to all members of Civil Defence. The contact telephone number for Carecall is 1800 409 673. Volunteers can ring this number 24/7, 365 days a year. An information leaflet on this service has been prepared and copies of this leaflet should be made available to all volunteers. A Carecall poster has also been prepared for Civil Defence and this poster should be displayed prominently in all Civil Defence buildings.

* CISM Network

Civil Defence is a member of CISM Network Ireland. We are committed to implementing best practice on CISM throughout the organisation. Further information on the network is available on [www.cismnetworkireland.ie](http://www.cismnetworkireland.ie)

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Policy & Planning

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**Guide to Critical Incident Stress Defusing**

**Purpose:**  A defusing event is held soon after Critical Incidents to:

* Quickly restore and enhance unit cohesion and effectiveness.
* Reduce short-term emotional and physical distress.
* Prevent long-term distress and "burnout".

**Requirement:** When a critical incident occurs during a Civil Defence activity, the officer in charge should organise a defusing event. After an exceptionally distressing event, the CDO should contact Civil Defence Branch in Roscrea to arrange a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) in conjunction with the Defence Forces.

Possible examples of "Critical Incidents” which deserve a formal debriefing include:

* Death of a Unit member (by accident, suicide, in especially tragic circumstances);
* Death or extreme suffering (especially women, children, infants);
* Having to handle dead bodies; other horrible sights or smells.
* Situations involving a serious accident or atrocity.

**Perspective:**

* The participants are normal persons who have survived an abnormal incident.
* Stress defusing is not therapy or counselling.
* Critical Incident Stress Defusing is basic, wise preventive maintenance for the human mind.

**Functions of the Critical Incident Stress Defusing**

* Resolve misunderstandings;
* Identify, share and validate the intense feelings experienced during and since the event;
* Demystify and reduce the normal physical stress reactions;
* Prepare everyone to recognise and resolve any emotional and physical after effects positively;
* Enhance individuals' ability to help themselves and their fellow volunteers;
* Encourage and inform where they can get more help if needed;
* Improve communication within the Unit, and enhance cohesion among the members;
* Prepare the Unit to face any future exposure.

**Setting Up a Critical Incident Stress Defusing**

**Who:**

* All Civil Defence members involved in the incident should be invited, however attendance is voluntary
* Normally includes only those directly involved in the event;
* May include a trusted support person, such as chaplain, medic, even if they were not present at the incident.
* No media or outsiders permitted.

**When:**

* Best done immediately after the event, if possible, but better late than never,
* After enough rest and recovery for all to be alert and involved;
* Expected duration 1 hour (depends on the number involved and the complexity of the critical event);

**Where:**

* An emotionally neutral place, relatively safe from distraction, observation;
* With enough light to see everyone;
* Sheltered from bad weather.

**How:** The defusing leader reviews the GROUND-RULES:

* All agree to strict confidentiality- a "pact of silence" not to repeat personal information or feelings shared in the debriefing. However, this does not override the legal and moral responsibility of all citizens to report criminal violation of the Law.
* No notes or recordings will be made;
* No one is required to speak, but all are encouraged to;
* Each speaker only speaks for self, not for others;
* All participants are equal during the defusing. All volunteers should speak frankly, even the newest, most junior participant in the event;
* Not an operational critique, but a discussion of the event to clarify what actually happened and help restore full well being;
* Fact-Finding, not Faultfinding…but "facts" include the team members’ personal reactions to the event. The Unit can derive operational "lessons-learned" later.
* Feelings expressed during the defusing are NOT to be used against the speaker or anyone. Everyone should have a “tough skin” to accept how others speak of them, and present their own viewpoint in turn.
* The team leaders stay available after the defusing to talk more with anyone who wants to.
* The team leader should remind those present of the supports available to the volunteers, including peer-to-peer support and Carecall.