

# CIVIL DEFENCE VOLUNTEER POLICY

## Introduction

Civil Defence is a volunteer based organisation that supports the Principal Response Agencies, government departments and state agencies during national, regional and local emergency and non-emergency events. Civil Defence also assists at a wide range of community, local authority, sporting and charitable events. Civil Defence recognises that volunteers are its most important resource and it is committed to promoting an effective, meaningful and rewarding volunteering experience.

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to guide volunteering within Civil Defence by:

- reinforcing the importance of volunteering to Civil Defence;
- establishing basic values and attitudes towards volunteering;
- setting out the responsibilities of Civil Defence towards its volunteers; and
- setting out the rights and responsibilities of people who volunteer for Civil Defence.

## 2. Scope

This policy applies to all Civil Defence volunteers.

## 3. Definition of a Volunteer

A volunteer is a person who has been enrolled in the Civil Defence organisation and carries out volunteering activities for Civil Defence. They, for personal, humanitarian or charitable reasons, freely and without expectation of financial gain, contribute time, service and skills to assist Civil Defence in accomplishing its mission.

### Categories of volunteers

- **Probationary.** This is a new volunteer who has been Garda vetted and is undergoing initial training for a minimum period of 12 months;
- **Active volunteer.** This is a volunteer who has completed their probationary period. They are Garda vetted, regularly attending training and making themselves available for Civil Defence activities. A volunteer who has not attended any Civil Defence activities in the past six months will not be regarded as active;
- **Reserve.** This is a formerly active volunteer who has up to date basic training and is Garda vetted. They have notified the Civil Defence Officer (CDO) or Assistant Civil Defence Officer (ACDO) that they are temporarily unavailable for training or duties, but they are available to assist in an emergency; and
- **Former volunteer.** Any volunteer who does not fit into the above categories.

## 4. Volunteer Rights

Volunteers have the following rights:

- Know what is expected from them;
- Be offered appropriate training, direction and suitable equipment;
- Receive supervision and support;

- Know who to go to if there is a problem;
- Make mistakes and learn from them;
- Be made aware of complaint and grievance procedures;
- Be made aware of how issues or difficulties will be dealt with;
- Be treated fairly and not experience discrimination;
- Have safe working conditions;
- Be informed about, and given the opportunity to play an active part in the organisation as a whole;
- Be able to say 'no' and to leave without feeling guilty; and
- Be thanked and to have their voluntary contribution recognised.

## **5. Organisations rights**

The Civil Defence organisation requires the following;

- Certain qualities and skills in our volunteers;
- Volunteers to understand and buy into the organisation ethos; and
- Tasks to be done in accordance with our operational procedures and guidelines and within certain timeframes.

All volunteers are expected to:

- strive and work for the highest standards of quality;
- to recognise and obey Civil Defence rules and procedures, including those set out in the Code of Conduct;
- to comply with all reasonable instructions and lawful orders, particularly those regarding Health & Safety, to the best of their ability;
- be available to assist in emergencies and in community events according to their skills and abilities;
- attend essential training and support sessions;
- participate actively in the work of Civil Defence;
- respect the values and aims of Civil Defence;
- be committed;
- be punctual, reliable and give sufficient warning if unable to turn up; and
- be honest if issues or difficulties arise.

Civil Defence reserves the right to ask volunteers to leave the organisation if their involvement hinders the organisation achieving its goals.

It is not appropriate that Civil Defence volunteers are also members of other volunteer based emergency response organisations.

## **6. Equal Opportunities**

Civil Defence acknowledges and respects the cultural and religious diversity that exists within Ireland and seeks to ensure that its volunteer base reflects the diversity of the local communities in which it operates. Any person over the age of 18 and resident in Ireland may apply to join the organisation regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, race, marital status, disability, membership of the traveller community, family status, religion, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, gender non-conformity, political opinion, residence status or social origin.

## **7. Induction and Training**

All new volunteers will be subject to a probationary period of at least 12 months. Full membership will not be issued until appropriate screening and initial training has been satisfactorily completed.

In this interim period, a range of suitable training and activities will be available to new volunteers. This will include an Induction Programme which may take the form of face-to-face meetings, group training and/or receiving relevant information online or by post. This will allow new members to fully understand the work of Civil Defence and how their work as a volunteer contributes to the goals of the organisation.

Civil Defence volunteers carry out a wide variety of activities and it is essential that our volunteers are appropriately skilled to carry out their specific role/s. Civil Defence offers volunteers a wide variety of training and development opportunities.

## **8. Garda Vetting and Child Protection**

The safety of volunteers and the people we serve is of paramount importance. All Civil Defence volunteers must undergo Garda Vetting as per the Civil Defence Garda Vetting Policy. Civil Defence provides Child Protection Awareness training which is mandatory for all volunteers.

## **9. Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)**

In the course of their Civil Defence duties volunteers may be exposed to distressing scenes. Civil Defence has a comprehensive CISM system in place. All volunteers are required to attend CISM awareness training.

## **10. Screening / References**

References will be sought and checked for all persons seeking to join Civil Defence.

## **11. Medical fitness**

Civil Defence undertakes a wide range of activities, some of which require a high level of fitness.

- Volunteers should not undertake any activities which are beyond their level of fitness;
- Volunteers should not attend for duties and/or training if medically unfit;
- Where volunteers are signed off sick from their normal employment, volunteers should not attend for duties and/or training;
- Civil Defence may require that volunteers or potential volunteers obtain certificates of medical fitness from a doctor;
- Volunteers should advise their CDO or ACDO if an illness or medical condition places themselves or anyone else at risk. The CDO/ACDO will deal sympathetically and discreetly with any information received;
- A volunteer may be asked to retire on health grounds, or be put on restricted duties, where their illness or condition might in the view of a doctor put the volunteer or other persons at risk and/or affect their ability to perform their duties; and
- If a volunteer becomes pregnant, she is advised to discuss her Civil Defence activities with her doctor. Any safeguards suggested by the doctor/medical staff must be strictly adhered to. When appropriate she shall inform her CDO or ACDO.

## **12. Recognition**

Volunteers will be recognised through the awarding of long service medals and through the holding of appropriate social events.

## **13. Insurance**

The Department of Defence has a Public Liability policy in place that protects Civil Defence in respect of claims being made against Civil Defence volunteers whilst participating in Civil Defence activities, subject to the terms conditions and exclusions of that policy. The Department also has insurance policies in place to compensate volunteers who suffer injury during the course of their Civil Defence activities.

## **14. Expenses**

Civil Defence recognises that some financial expense may be incurred during the course of volunteering. Reasonable out of pocket expenses may be reimbursed in accordance with approved rates and with the prior approval of the CDO or ACDO.

## **15. Complaints Procedure**

All volunteers have the right to have their voice heard if they have a concern or complaint. The relevant procedures are outlined in the Code of Conduct.

## **16. Key Documents for Civil Defence Volunteers:**

These are available on the Civil Defence website;

- Garda Vetting Policy;
- Child Protection Policy;
- Code of Conduct.

Queries relating to the policy should be discussed with the CDO or ACDO in the first instance.

The policy is issued by the Civil Defence Branch, Department of Defence, Benamore, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary.

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