



CIVIL DEFENCE

Cosaint Shibhialta

2024





Foreword

Is mór an onóir agus is cúis áthais dom Iris Cosanta Sibhialta na bliana seo a chur i láthair, ar foilseachán bliantúil í de chuid eagraíochta a bhfuil ról tábhachtach aici i saol na tíre.

Bliain ghnóthach eile a bhí in 2023 agus muid ag leanúint den tiomáint chun an eagraíocht a nuachóiriú agus acmhainní cuí a sholáthar di.

I mí an Mheithimh, shínigh an tUachtarán an tAcht um Chosaint Sibhialta, 2023, chun bunús dlí nua-aimseartha a chur ar fáil do phríomhsheirbhís nua-aimseartha, agus chun na cleachtais atá ann anois a léiriú agus soiléireacht dhlíthiúil a sholáthar. Idir an dá linn, shínigh mé, go comhthreomhar, na Rialacháin maidir le Cosaint Sibhialta (Cód Cleachtais) ina ndlí, ar rialacháin iad lenar soláthraíodh feidhm dhlíthiúil agus creat oifigiúil don saorálaíocht laistigh den Chosaint Sibhialta.

Anuas ar an reachtaíocht nua maidir le Cosaint Sibhialta, cuireadh béim ar an oiliúint, an trealamh agus na feithiclí a fháil a theastaíonn uaidhse sna Aonaid Cosanta Sibhialta chun bhur ról iomadúla a chomhlíonadh.

Maidir leis seo, bhí áthas orm go raibh an Chosaint Sibhialta in ann leas a bhaint as Ciste na gCuntas Díomhaoin arís, agus leithdháileadh €400,000 breise in 2023.

Bhí an leithdháileadh seo mar chuid de chlár leanúnach ilbhliantúil chun flít feithiclí na Cosanta Sibhialta a nuachóiriú, agus le himeacht aimsire tá an buntáiste a bhaineann leis seo le feiceáil i ngach Aonad Cosanta Sibhialta, ina bhfuil flít nua-aimseartha anois ag saorálaithe, flít atá oiriúnach dá bhfeidhm agus a bhfuil na hacmhainní cuí aige chun freagairt do ghlaonna éigeandála agus do ghlaonna neamhéigeandála.

Over the summer of 2023, the new Volunteer and Equipment Management System (VEMS) was launched.

The purpose of VEMS is to change the way Civil Defence is managed. Volunteers now access training and duties information through their smartphone or tablet and can respond with availability.

VEMS will make life easier for Civil Defence Officers by streamlining and automating many routine administrative tasks. The system will also provide the Department of Defence with timely information on Civil Defence activities across the country, supporting better planning so that each Unit can get the appropriate equipment and training they need for their specific pattern of duties.

2023 saw the timely return of the Civil Defence to the National Ploughing Championships. Taking their place in the Government Village between An Garda Síochána and the Coast Guard, Volunteers and Civil Branch staff showcased medical response procedures, vehicles and equipment to the public who braved the rain and the mud. I was delighted to have the opportunity to visit the Civil Defence Stand and meet with volunteers on the final day of the Championships, when the sun finally came out!

In October, the flooding in Midleton and other parts of Cork showed the Civil Defence organisation at its very best. Unfortunately, and in spite of improved flood defences across the country, the threat of serious flooding will never be far from us and I am grateful that the Civil Defence have the training and equipment to make a key contribution in local emergency responses.

In November, I met with the three Cork Civil Defence Units, when officers and Volunteers gave me an excellent overview of their new equipment, particularly drones and mapping/search software. This represents an investment that enables the Civil defence to play a key role in support of An Garda Síochána in missing person searches. I met also with other emergency services who work with Civil Defence in these difficult search cases and appreciated hearing about the important role they play.

Finally, I wish to thank all our Volunteers and their Officers for their continuing commitment to Civil Defence. As Tánaiste and Minister for Defence I have huge respect and deep gratitude for the work you do, and I look forward to meeting many of you in the coming months.

Micheál Martin TD, Tánaiste and Minister for Defence



Many thanks for affording me this opportunity to thank the Civil Defence volunteers for their unswerving commitment and efforts during 2023. I commend all of you on your continuing work with missing person searches and extreme weather events. These are some of the most testing duties undertaken by you the Volunteers and deserve our recognition. Your work in these areas is critically important, is an invaluable support to An Garda Síochána, and is essential within the community.

I want also to thank the Civil Defence Officers and Assistant Civil Defence Officers for your excellent professional support over the past 12 months. Your roles are critical to ensuring that your Units are resourced and ready to respond to the many challenges posed. We are so grateful for your willingness to volunteer your time, energy and talents. I very much enjoyed meeting with many of you in 2023 and hope to see many more of you throughout 2024.

With best wishes,

Jacqui McCrum, Secretary General, Department of Defence

Civil Defence 2023

Civil Defence Activities:

From 1st January 2023 to 31st December 2023 Civil Defence volunteers completed **2,672** taskings.

Taskings were undertaken as follows:



Vehicle Fleet Grant Aid:

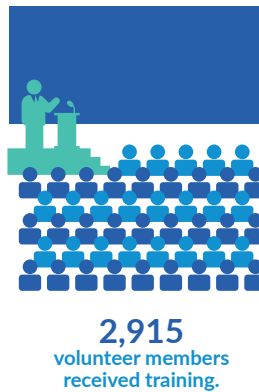
Grant-Aid totalling **€429,688**

was paid to Local Authorities towards the **upgrade of the Civil Defence vehicle fleet.**



College Training:

A total of **466** training courses were completed.



Instructor and Responder Training was conducted in the following disciplines:



An Roinn Cosanta
Department of Defence

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First Female Civil Defence K9 Handler

In January 2023, Meath Volunteer Dog Handler Karen Kelly and her Victim Recovery Dog, Rossi qualified after a year-long training programme which included 150 hours of guided training from a National Association of Specialist Dog Users (NASDU) recognised body. It culminated in her being awarded a Level 3 Certificate NASDU, U.K., which is a Highfield Awarding Body Centre (HABC).

Civil Defence acquired its first search dog in 2006. As of December 2023, Civil Defence had four search dog teams based in Dublin, Meath, and Tipperary (due to retire at end of 2023). These comprise one Air-Scenting dog (taken out of service at end of 2023) used in searching for live persons, and four Victim Recovery Dogs used in searches for deceased persons. These dogs regularly assist An Garda Síochána in missing person searches throughout the State. The volunteer search dog handlers have shown great commitment to this work over the years.



Civil Defence K9 Assessments

On the weekend of 24-25 June Civil Defence K-9 units completed their independent assessments. Special thanks to all K9 handlers and search dogs for the selfless hours of training that they invest in this activity.



Our People

Civil Defence welcomed a number of new personnel to Civil Defence Officer (CDO) and Assistant Civil Defence Officer (ACDO) roles during the course of 2023.

Steven Hayes took over the mantle of Civil Defence Officer in Clare following the retirement of Noel Carmody.

A total of 3 Assistant Civil Defence Officer posts were created. Desmond Foley was appointed to Roscommon, Della Lindsay was appointed to Sligo and Peter Keenan was appointed to Longford.



Noel Carmody former CDO, Clare



Steven Hayes CDO, Clare



Peter Keenan ACDO, Longford



Della Lindsay ACDO, Sligo

National Ploughing Championships 2023, Ratheniska, Co Laois

Civil Defence displayed all that is good about the organisation over the course of three days (19-21 September) at the National Ploughing Championships in Ratheniska, Co Laois.

Weather conditions, especially on Tuesday, made things more challenging, particularly underfoot, but the event proved a great success in terms of raising awareness among the general public of what Civil Defence do for communities countrywide and what Civil Defence resources are capable of doing.

Units from Laois, Offaly and Kildare assisted the National Ploughing Association throughout the three-day event.

Volunteers from Kildare, Offaly, Tipperary and Kilkenny manned the Civil Defence site together with Department of Defence staff from the Civil Defence Branch.

CPR demos were provided daily to all-comers, drone and sonar demos were very well received, and we had a very healthy number of visitors to the All-terrain Vehicle, the 4WD Ambulance, the Whaly Boat and the Communications Vehicle.



▲ *Ploughing Championships, Minister for Defence, Micheál Martin visits Civil Defence site*



▲ *Drones and sonar equipment demo on site*



▲ *Ploughing Championships, CPR demo on site*



▲ Ploughing Championships, manning our info desk

▼ Ploughing Championships, visitors to the Whaly Boat on site



▲ 4WD Ambulance stretcher demo on site

▼ Two young visitors to the All terrain Vehicle



Visit of US President Joe Biden to Louth and Mayo

Volunteers from Louth Civil Defence were tasked on Wednesday 12th April to provide medical cover for the visit of US President Joe Biden to Louth. They endured high winds and torrential rain for several hours, providing services to the public throughout the afternoon and evening, including responding to several medical emergencies.

President Biden visited Ballina on the evening of Friday 14th April. Civil Defence deployed 30 members to support this historic event. Mayo Civil Defence

received support from Galway and Offaly Civil Defence and worked alongside Order of Malta Ireland, An Garda Síochána, The Health Service Executive, Mayo Fire and Rescue and Mayo County Council, to ensure all attendees had a safe and enjoyable experience.

The operation was supported by Paul Brophy, Communications Officer, Civil Defence Branch, who provided technical support to ensure inter-operability between agencies was possible.



Volunteering For Civil Defence



Name: Brendan Coady
Unit: Kilkenny Civil Defence

● **Brendan's background**

When I joined in 2010 I was working in financial and recruitment services. I had no first aid training, was nervous of heights and was an average swimmer. Fast forward to today I am an Advanced Paramedic with the National Ambulance service, hold a level 2 powerboat licence and have Swiftwater training.

● **Why Brendan got involved with Civil Defence**

In 2010 I looked at joining Civil Defence as I came across their website and I liked the sound of what they did. I wanted to learn new skills particularly medical but also the other skills Civil Defence offered such as rescue boats, swift water and communications. I really

enjoyed volunteering at community events and that started my interest in medical.

● **Brendan's role in Civil Defence and activities undertaken**

Today, I hold the position of First Officer, and am head of the medical unit in Kilkenny. This involves ensuring medical stock is up to date, medical bags are in order, our emergency vehicles (such as our ambulances and 4x4 ambulance) are in good working order and ready to respond to any calls. I also plan medical exercises for our volunteers to ensure they keep their skills up, and work with my civil defence officer in providing medical cover to various community and national events. I also instruct in a range of medical response courses. As a statutory volunteer emergency service, we provide assistance to local authorities and HSE in major emergencies such as adverse weather events.

● **Brendan's love of Civil Defence**

I enjoy Civil Defence as it has certainly played a big part in my transition from the financial industry to the emergency services industry. It has been quite the adventure and I have learned so much. It also provided me with a broad range of new skills and confidence. I have gained lifelong friends, not just in my own local unit, but nationally. Weekly training also provides an opportunity to catch up with colleagues and friends. My positive experience volunteering with Kilkenny Civil Defence was the catalyst that made me re-evaluate my life choices, leave my job in the financial services and go back to study to be a Paramedic. I would highly recommend to anyone that feels they need something different, to contact their local Civil Defence unit and see what they think.

Training and Technical Review

In response to the evolving requirements in emergency response the Civil Defence Branch has combined the Technical and Training Sections into a single unit.

In merging the two units we will endeavour that technical expertise and training programmes are closely linked and place Civil Defence at the forefront of preparedness in the face of diverse challenges.

Civil Defence Branch Training Administrative Section:

The new Volunteer and Equipment Management System (VEMS) was introduced, which provides for better and more comprehensive information on training.

The VEMS portal allows Volunteers to be more involved in monitoring expiry of certificates and to submit their applications for training.

LSP:

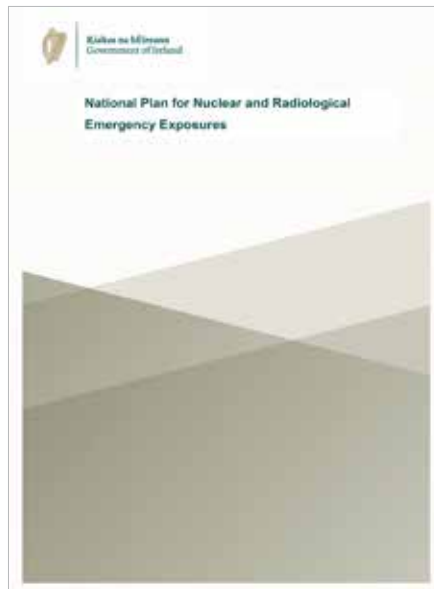
The Learning Support Portal (LSP) has been a success in transforming how Civil Defence Volunteers can learn remotely at a time and place that suits them. All they require is the internet.

Radiation Monitoring:

The annual national radiation monitoring exercise was conducted on 10th June, (the same day as the first of two of our Missing Person Seminars, and Harry Styles performed in Slane Castle, so it was a particularly busy day for volunteers countrywide, Meath Civil Defence, and assisting units and Branch Staff).

It was nice to have the exercise in summer, but the next exercise

will be conducted in Q1 of 2025 so have the wet gear ready! In advance of the exercise, a group of over 20 Volunteers attended a training day in the EPA laboratory in Dublin. They found this very useful, to understand the importance of the sampling quality and how CD play a role in the National Plan for Nuclear and Radiological Emergency Exposures [gov - National Plan for Nuclear and Radiological Emergency Exposures \(www.gov.ie\)](http://gov.ie)



Civil Defence Branch has received funding from the Defence Innovate programme. We have developed a proof of concept app which connects our Kromek Radiation Detectors to mobile devices. This first phase is currently being tested in Civil Defence Branch. It is planned to use this in some units in our National Exercise in 2025.

Medical Equipment:

Twenty four Zoll AEDS were procured centrally and distributed across the country.

Our colleagues in NAS donated eight ambulances in 2023, helping to keep our fleet up to date.

Communications Equipment:

New Fixed Communications Mast Infrastructure was installed in the new Civil Defence stations in Cavan, Westmeath and Dublin.

New Motorola TETRA radios were procured to expand the current stock. We will continue this expansion in 2024 along with the rollout of more DMR UHF Radios.

Search Equipment:

New C Class drones were purchased for Wicklow, Meath, Monaghan, Laois, Cork West and Cork North & East.

A communications vehicle was delivered to Cork City and it was showcased at a media event in Cork City, where all four new communications equipment were demonstrated to an Tánaiste.

A media event was also held in Phoenix Training Centre, (Ratra) to showcase the K9 unit nationally and the newly qualified dog and handler in Meath. The event received wide coverage.

New Portable Underwater Mapping Aid (PUWMA) Helix Sonars were grant aided for Meath, Mayo, Laois and Kilkenny. Training courses have been delivered to a number of units following the award of a contract with Mariteq Solutions.

Seminars:

There were two missing person seminars in June and December 2023 with a range of speakers from within Civil Defence and from external agencies who all provided the audiences with great learnings from their experiences or the subject matters.

Sharing and Learning for Better Outcomes

In December 2023, we had a wonderful day of sharing search experiences, reflecting on search strategy implications within our different communities, and exploring how we, as a community centric organisation, can maximise positive search outcomes.

Cep Carty welcomed all to the seminar, and was thrilled to see so many people from across the country join us in Roscrea.



Cep noted there was a wide range of speakers and topics and thanked all in advance for taking time out to share their stories, experiences and insights.

Dublin Civil Defence Officer, James McConnell, brought an international perspective to the day as he explored the theme 'You are on our minds' – *Dementia and going missing in an Urban, Rural or Disaster situation*.

James had been working with colleagues from a range of European nations to develop dementia specific training and resources which is transferable to any setting. James' research focused on dementia in the community and how agencies can respond following both major natural and manmade disaster events. James research showed the value of consulting with a wide range of stakeholders, exploring perceptions, and identifying what opportunities exist to promote dementia related online training.

We all agreed that linking in with this online training would be a very positive step forward.



Down Syndrome Ireland's Elizabeth Fox and John Condon

On an extension of this theme, Down Syndrome Ireland's, Elizabeth Fox and John Condon brought us on a journey where we explored what exactly Down Syndrome is, and how children and adults interact with the world around them.

Elizabeth outlined how their new online TORCH course would be available the back end of 2024, while John emphasised the importance of recognising the diverse communication styles we are likely to encounter among this community.

A stand out part of the session was recognising, and discussing the degree of overlap between Down Syndrome and the Autism Spectrum. This was, to many of us, a very new dimension to our understanding of Down Syndrome. The importance of communication, and recognising individual characteristics and preferences, was such a central part of our session.

Staying with the theme of autism, our segment on 'Raising the

Spectrum on Autism – Challenging assumptions and implications for search,' was a very insightful session from Áine Magee of Autism Awareness Roscrea.

Áine, who has a child of her own with Autism, shared both her own and her organisations journey,

working with, supporting, and encouraging children to maximise their potential. Áine also challenged some common misconceptions, and our understanding of Autism.

It was evident from Áine that the term Autism is an umbrella for many neurological pathways.



Dublin Civil Defence Officer James McConnell spoke of the project 'You are on our minds'



Paul Brophy exploring the technological advancements in Civil Defence

One of the key takeaways in this session was that autism should not be seen as an illness, just a different way in which people think and interpret the world around them. This provided food for thought, as we explored autism in the context of a missing person incident; and the need to consider and plan a search response. We explored how the use of noise and bright lights can be appropriate for one variant of autism, and have a very negative impact on another. Or in simple terms – our approach to use of vehicles and lights can have positive or negative impacts depending on the missing person’s needs. It was a really key learning point which reinforced the importance of evidence-based people centred search planning.

Our colleagues from the Civil Defence K9 Team took us through the scale and ability of our canine friends in their talk *Unleashed!* - *The role of Victim Recovery Dogs in search operations.*

Both Karen Kelly and Michael O’Sullivan explored the selection, training, and capability of K9 Search Dogs, and the vital role and contribution they make to the search response. Who knew that a dog’s nose is up to 100,000 times more sensitive than humans! That amazing trait allows our canine friends to detect decomposition scent coming from underwater or beneath layers of soil.

The Branch’s Communication Officer, Paul Brophy, brought us up to date on technological developments, including drones communications systems, sonar and the other technology to support our search strategies, decision making and information management.

‘After the Search’ Wicklow’s Experience was a natural final step in our day. Civil Defence Officer Michael Carroll explored the importance of being aware of, and recognising critical incident stress indicators in volunteers in the post search phase.

Michael outlined the emotional challenge of search and recovery on volunteers; the importance of both formal and informal, supports that allows teams to talk about these adverse experiences.

The big takeaway from the day, was that each potential missing person incident is unique, with different influences and factors, the importance of keeping evidence based decision making central to our search planning, and the need to test that evidence for validity and bias.

Cep Carty concluded the Seminar with her own thoughts on the day, reflecting on the contributions from each speaker and the energetic questions and answers sessions that followed. And on behalf of Civil Defence, Cep thanked all for taking time out to attend the Seminar, noting the exceptional depth of experience and professionalism in those who attended.

Civil Defence Throughout The Year

Fire at Wexford General Hospital

On Wednesday afternoon, 1st March 2023 a major emergency was declared after a fire broke out in the machinery room of Wexford General Hospital.

Over 200 patients had to be evacuated but no injuries were reported among either patients or staff.

The patients, some seriously ill and in intensive care, were transported by ambulances to hospitals in Kilkenny, Waterford, Cork and Dublin, in what has been described as the biggest evacuation in the history of the health service.

Civil Defence units from Wexford, Waterford and Kilkenny were immediately deployed to assist with the evacuation, utilising ambulances, minibuses, jeeps and the Wexford Welfare Unit. Communications Network assistance was also provided by Paul Brophy, Civil Defence Branch.

Early on Thursday morning additional ambulances and minibuses were provided by Civil Defence Units from Offaly, Tipperary, Wicklow, Dublin, Kildare, Cork



North & East and Limerick, assisting with the evacuation of the remainder of the patients.

In total Civil Defence deployed 53 volunteers, 12 ambulances, 15 minibuses and 6 4WD vehicles. During the tasking Civil Defence transported 22 patients and support staff to hospitals in Kilkenny, Waterford, Dublin, Enniscorthy and Gorey.

Cavan Civil Defence – New Headquarters



Micheál Martin, Tánaiste and Minister for Defence visited the new Civil Defence headquarters in Cavan on Friday 26th May.

The Tánaiste met with John Maguire CDO, Carmel Prior ACDO and a number of volunteers.

Sea2Summit Adventure Race – Westport

On Saturday 11th November Mayo Civil Defence volunteers provided medical resources and operational support to the 2023 Sea2Summit adventure race in Westport which attracted over 2,000 competitors. Civil Defence was assisted on the day by Roscommon Civil Defence and Murray Ambulance working alongside An Garda Síochána Traffic Corps and race organisers.



Donegal Flooding, Raphoe and Castlefin



On Saturday evening 22nd July, Donegal Civil Defence AFS and Swift Water units were activated by Donegal County Council to assist the Donegal Fire Service with flooding in the Finn Valley area, which affected the towns of Raphoe and Castlefin in east Donegal.

Civil Defence deployed the following resources to Raphoe Town, reporting into the Fire Service Incident Command Officer on arrival;

- CDO and ACDO
- 7 Person -Stranorlar / Donegal Town AFS crew
- 3 Person Swift Water team
- 3 4WD vehicles with trailers
- 1 Incident Command Vehicle
- 400 Sandbags

In Raphoe Town, Civil Defence

assisted the Donegal Fire Service and the Local Authority Roads Section with the deployment of sandbags to the business premises of The Diamond and William Streets. On the Guest House End / Magherahane Road section of the town, two Civil Defence personnel were deployed to call on residents to check on their welfare and deploy sandbags where necessary.

After midnight Civil Defence was requested by the Incident Commander to go to Carrick, Castlefin to assist an elderly resident whose home was flooded. On arrival, the crew reported to the Donegal Fire Service, on-site Incident Command Officer and they assisted with sandbagging of the premises.

Laois Search & Recovery Operation



On Wednesday 12th July Laois Civil Defence was activated by An Garda Síochána to carry out a search operation of a woodland area for a missing person outside of Portlaoise town. 17 volunteers responded to the call and were on the scene within 30 minutes of the initial request. Search operations continued over the following week, through difficult terrain and in poor weather conditions assisted by search teams from Kildare, Offaly and Kilkenny, and by K9 units from Dublin and Tipperary.

The missing person was located by a Civil Defence drone team and a recovery operation was carried out by members of Civil Defence, An Garda Síochána and Laois Fire Service.

Dublin Water Outage



During a major water outage on Thursday evening 25th May Dublin Civil Defence activated five fire appliances and crews to deliver approximately 180,000 litres of water to two medical facilities.

Storm Babet – Flood Relief Efforts

Approximately 50 Cork North and East Civil Defence volunteers were deployed early on 18th October to assist with emergency flood response in Midleton and surrounding areas. A control centre was set up at Midleton Fire Station, from which key agencies, including Civil Defence organised and directed the response. The response consisted of swift water technicians, swift water first responders, boat crews and coxswains, and other volunteers, who responded with two boats, inflatable walkways, two portable water pumps and multiple 4WD vehicles. They assisted with the evacuation of people from flooded homes and cars. A number of dialysis patients were transported to Cork University Hospital for treatment.

16 Cork West Civil Defence members were activated at 5pm to assist with the setting up a rest centre and with various other taskings.

11 Cork City volunteers were



mobilised in the early afternoon to assist the local authority in the Glanmire and Blackpool areas with water pumping and evacuation of homes.

Tánaiste and Minister for Defence, Micheál Martin acknowledged the trojan efforts of all involved: ***“I want to thank the Civil Defence volunteers and Defence Forces members who have provided essential assistance in flood relief efforts - working long hours in very challenging conditions to help those affected by the terrible flooding. It is important to also recognise the***



companies and businesses who have freed up the volunteers from their day jobs to provide this emergency assistance”.

Infant Hospital Transfer – Dublin to Donegal



Great cooperation between Dublin and Donegal Civil Defence on Tuesday 14th November, transporting three week old baby girl and her mother from the Children’s Hospital Crumlin to Letterkenny, Co Donegal.

Westmeath HQ Official Opening



A ceremony to mark the official opening of the new Westmeath Civil Defence Headquarters took place on Friday 28th July.

New Members are always welcome. Enrolment enquiries may be made through your local Civil Defence Officer. Contact details are on our website

www.civildefence.ie