

County's Critical Incident Response Team Celebrates 10 Years of Services to Emergency First Responders

Poughkeepsie...Dutchess County Executive Marcus J. Molinaro congratulates the Dutchess County Critical Incident Response Team on the celebration of its 10th anniversary. Originally established in 2002, the Critical Incident Response Team is a highly trained group of peer volunteers who provide services to first responders to help them deal with the high levels of pressure and stress when faced with horrific circumstances at emergency scenes. The Dutchess County CIRT is an all-volunteer team from various Dutchess County Fire, EMS, Police and 911 Dispatch services.

“First responders are often faced with unimaginable circumstances and our trained Critical Incident Response Team helps them deal with the stress that can come with tragic events,” said County Executive Molinaro. “The CIRT volunteers are there, at the scene, to provide the necessary support to help first responders stay focused on the emergency and are again there for them after the event to deal with the post event stress and trauma.”

The focus of the CIRT is to support the efforts of emergency services personnel and minimize the harmful effects of the crisis on individual responders. In recent years, the needs of emergency personnel have been more widely recognized. The work first responders do can be emotionally difficult, physically draining and can have a profound impact on all aspects of their life. First responders are subject to stress reactions that can include fatigue, nausea, headaches, depression, guilt, anxiety, insomnia, flashbacks and more. The CIRT, which is often supplemented by mental health professionals from the Dutchess County Department of Mental Hygiene, is trained to assist emergency responders to deal with that stress.

The CIRT team provides services in three primary ways:

Defusing - opportunities for first responders at the scene of a horrific or prolonged emergency event that allow them to "unload" emotions and or frustrations of what is unfolding. The CIRT utilizes an enclosed trailer as

a mobile command post for the team when it's deployed to lengthy critical events or mass casualty incidents. These defusing sessions enable firefighters, EMT's, paramedics, police officers, and 911 dispatchers to remain on the job and continue to serve.

Debriefing - These sessions are usually held 24-72 hours after an event and allow first responders who were on scene to discuss the event and help them deal with the emotions they are feeling including sadness, grief, fear, wanting to quit, etc.

Training– the CIRT provides Critical Stress Awareness presentations to emergency services agencies throughout the year to help prepare for future events. These training events are designed to help first responders deal with stressors and recognize warning signs and symptoms of mental exhaustion.

Since its inception, the CIRT has provided a total of **148 interventions** including debriefings, defusings, and peer assistance sessions to emergency responders throughout Dutchess County at the request of various emergency services' agencies. Some of the critical incidents that the CIRT has responded to and has provided support at include:

- Beekman Fire Department Firefighter Line of Duty Death in 2005
- Morley family tragedy in Fishkill in 2007
- Beekman Fire Department Firefighter Line of Duty Death in 2005
- City of Poughkeepsie Police Officer Line of Duty Death in 2011
- Fatal Boating Accident in Tivoli in 2011

In total, the dedicated members of CIRT have volunteered more of 7,300 hours of service to emergency responders.

Dutchess County Legislature Chairman Robert Rolison said, “As a former Town of Poughkeepsie police officer, I know the need was great for the services the CIRT offers. Police officers and first responders have to go into circumstances they have no control over and can be unspeakable. The addition of the much needed CIRT services was an important tool to help first responders successfully deal with the impacts of tragedies.”

Dutchess County Legislator Ken Roman, who serves as the Chair of the Public Safety Committee, concurred, “Serving as an active Police Lieutenant with the Town of Poughkeepsie and previous Crisis Negotiator, I know how valuable it is to have a local CIRT available for our first responder community. The availability of trained emergency services peers to talk to you at the scene, or later when you are trying to deal with the lingering effects of the event, is so vital to the mental health and well – being of police and other emergency first responders.”

The CIRT was formed in April, 2002 when the Dutchess County Legislature, including then County Legislator Molinaro, adopted the resolution to establish the team. The original team consisted of 8 members, 4 of who continue to serve on the team today. As the need for the team’s services has increased, the size of the team has grown. Today, 20 volunteers serve on the CIRT.

Current CIRT members include:

Beth Alter	Mary Ann
Lamay	
Laura Beck	Vinny Lopez
Bill Butler*	Patti Lynch
Paul Coiteux*	Chris Manning
Heather Cooper	Sue Puggioni
Theresa Dean	Carl Quaglino
Janice Elderkin	Greg Rayburn

Colleen Feroe *

Dee Sagendorph

Patti Fusco

Chuck Tuttle

Bryant Knapp

Steve Tuttle

According to CIRT Team Coordinator Steven Tuttle, Dutchess County's CIRT is a recognized and registered team with the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation with its members committed to ongoing education and training. Over the past decade, team members have participated in numerous courses focusing on Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) techniques including Peer Support, Suicide Intervention, Line-of-Duty Death, Strategic Response to Crisis, CISM for Families, School Crisis Response and more.

"To voluntarily take on the pain and suffering a colleague is experiencing and then assist them back to duty is only something that an extraordinary person could do," said Emergency Response Coordinator Dana Smith. The members of our Dutchess County CIRT provide an extremely valuable resource to our community, yet operate quietly outside the spotlight. Congratulations to each of them for the invaluable contributions they have made."

The Dutchess County CIRT will be recognized by County Executive Molinaro and the Dutchess County Legislature at the Legislature's April board meeting on Monday, April 16th at 7pm in the Legislative Chamber at 22 Market Street in Poughkeepsie. Legislative meetings can be viewed online at www.dutchessny.gov.

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