

HSRMS SAFETY STATEMENT MANUAL

MANAGING POTENTIALLY THREATENING/ VIOLENT/DISTRESSING INCIDENTS IN THE WORKPLACE

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1.0 POLICY

1.1 Introduction

In accordance with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 it is the policy of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine [DAFM] to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of all employees, volunteers, contractors, visitors and members of the public. In the workplace the Department is committed to providing a positive, respectful and safe working environment for its employees and visitors. For certain officers the workplace may vary, depending on the officer's duties, and may include third party premises.

Mindful of the contributory factors to a person's wellbeing and the need to raise awareness of the supports for a person in crisis this Department is fully supportive of Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015 – 2020 [Connecting for Life] and has given a particular commitment to the following actions:-

- Integrate suicide prevention measures into relevant national policies and programmes for people that are at an increased risk of suicide within the agriculture sector.
- Develop, with the assistance of the National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP), protocols for DAFM and agency staff who may come into contact with people who are vulnerable to/at risk of suicidal behaviour.
- Deliver suicide prevention training to frontline staff who are likely to come into contact with people who are vulnerable to/at risk of suicidal behaviour.

Although assault, harassment, intimidation, threat by or against any employee or customer, threats of suicide and self harm, damage to DAFM property and to property belonging to an employee / visitor are not a typical part of a DAFM employee's role, unfortunately these types of incidents happen and can be very upsetting, disruptive and difficult to manage for the individuals involved. Such incidents are however quite rare. The health, safety and wellbeing of staff is always of paramount importance, not just when incidents outlined above occur, but at all times. It is acknowledged that support be provided for staff who experience such incidents and that procedures are in place locally for dealing with such situations should they arise.

To support staff in coping with such incidents this Department's policy has been prepared to reflect the Department's procedures, guidelines and advice which should enable staff to assess and manage threatening behaviour, threat of self harm and threat of suicide / violent incidences between staff and visitors or customers in the workplace.

As it would be extremely difficult to produce a comprehensive list of each and every type of possible incident that may arise and guidelines on how to manage each type, this policy document has focused on key issues which could arise and these are set out in the guidelines in this document. Though one's perception of a threat is subjective, every incident should be taken seriously and supportive action given.

Incidents of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment between staff members should be handled under the Department's procedures which are based on the policy document titled "Dignity at Work - An Anti-Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy for the Irish Civil Service", which is available from Human Resources and on the eZone. You are advised to familiarise yourself with these procedures.

These procedures should also be included in any safety statements and risk assessments completed for an office and/or workplace within this Department.

1.2 Definitions

Appendix 2 of Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015 – 2020 [pages 72 to 74] contains a range of definitions pertaining to suicide and self harm. An extract of selected definitions are:-

- **Self-harm:** Self-harm describes the various methods by which people harm themselves. Varying degrees of suicidal intent can be present and sometimes there may not be any suicidal intent, although an increased risk of further suicidal behaviour is associated with all self-harm.
- **Suicide/die by suicide:** Suicide is death resulting from an intentional, self-inflicted act (Suicide attempt/attempted suicide/someone who has attempted suicide. A suicide attempt means any non-fatal suicidal behaviour, when someone has the intent to take their own life.

1.3 Applicable Legislation

Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005.

Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, (General Application Regulations), 2007

1.4 Protection of Good Samaritan from liability for negligence

During an incident, where a distressed person threatens suicide / self harm or threatening to harm others the distressed person may disclose certain personal information (e.g. suffering from depression, financial stress, family difficulties) to the person offering assistance. This personal information would have been kept confidential until the incident but in such emergencies the helper may make a family member / friend / doctor / emergency services aware of this background information in the interest of protecting the person. In such incidents the helper cannot be held liable for any action taken as the helper would have done so in good faith. [See Part 3, Section 4 of the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act of 2011].

1.5 Compliance with data protection obligations.

The Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003 provide that restrictions on processing of personal data may be lifted in emergency situations if necessary to prevent injury or damage to a person's health. To that end, any information shared with a family member / Gardaí, etc that is factual information concerning the behaviour of the individual and their demeanor may be relayed without breaching data protection requirements.

If a situation arises where the employee / customer has volunteered further information (e.g. of their medical situation / history, financial hardships etc) to a staff member who feels this would be important to inform a third party involved this matter is covered under Section 8(d) of the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003, which states:

“Any restrictions in this Act on the processing of personal data do not apply if the processing is.....required urgently to prevent injury or other damage to the health of a person or serious loss of or damage to property”.

It is advised that the staff member inform the distressed person that the incident has to be reported to line management and a third party [e.g. family member/friend/emergency service] and in these circumstances it is not possible to keep such incidents / information confidential but that the information would be shared on a restricted basis. In any incident the focus of the conversation should be on the individual's wellbeing and care. Further details of disclosed information should **not** be sought (e.g. cause of late payments, inspections, penalties etc).

2.0 Types of Threatening Behaviour or Violent Incidents

Many factors are involved in a threatening or violent incident and they may sometimes arise without warning or indication. Such incidents may arise with a colleague or customer. Threatening behaviour or violence may include some of the following:-

- Unruly / menacing behaviour by persons in a protest group
- Unruly / menacing behaviour protest by an individual
- During an unauthorised occupation of a DAFM location staff may experience threatening or offensive behaviour, such as, shouting aggressively, thumping a counter or slamming a door on entering or leaving an office
- Harassment and intimidation including unwelcome and rude gestures
- Threat of physical violence to an officer or customer in the company of an officer¹ [e.g. setting dog(s) on officer]
- Indirect threats / intimidation i.e. damage to property owned by the officer or Department or threatening to damage property.
- Verbal abuse (abusive behaviour) e.g. swearing, in person or over the telephone, of either a personal or general nature
- Written abuse of either a personal or general nature
- Volatile or erratic behaviour which induces a fear of a violent attack or verbal abuse.

2.1 Reasons for threatening behaviour / violence or self harm

The reasons for threatening behaviour / violence or of suicide will vary and is a complex area to understand. Some of the reasons which give rise to incidents may include:

- Unrealistic expectations
- Environmental factors
- Alcohol and/or substance abuse
- Stress, frustration, hopelessness, feelings of inadequacy
- Mental wellbeing of the employee, visitor and customer
- (Perceived) bias, discrimination or indifference on the part of staff to the customer
- Pretence of threatening behaviour / violence/ self harm to avoid dealing with officials.

2.2 Indicators of the potential for threatening behaviour

It is important to recognise the early warning signs in people and indeed in groups of people who might be potentially violent and/or intimidatory. Sometimes a threat can be made quite openly, e.g. in possession of a firearm/ handling an instrument in a threatening manner [spade/large machine tool], threatening language and/or gestures / threat of setting dogs against you/ herding animals to block your safe exit.

However the less obvious signs are more difficult to detect and interpret. An example is as follows:-

The individual [customer / colleague] may:

- Be tense and agitated

¹ This is very much down to how perceived by the individual at the time of the threat. [Those threats directed at a person and of a level that they become criminal in nature, i.e. “threats to kill or cause serious harm”, as provided for under Section 5 of the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997.]

- Reply to questions abruptly
- Increase voice pitch and volume
- Feet banging, kicking, thumping
- Exhibit unusual or inconsistent behaviour, e.g. the noisy person who becomes quiet and withdrawn
- Begin to make threatening gestures, e.g. shaking, stamping, closed fists
- Invade your personal space and/or restricted access areas
- Begin to verbally threaten, swearing or deliver ultimatum accompanied with personalised threats
- Person becomes anxious, fearful or withdrawn, exhibit a brusque change of mood or articulate irrational conclusions or false beliefs.

2.3 Signs of a distress person who may be considering suicide or self harm

The following is a short list of behaviours which indicate that a person is distressed and in certain circumstance, may be considering self harm or suicide:-

- Threatening statements and behaviours
- Verbalise the threat of self harm either in an aggressive or passive manner
- Intense anxiety, agitation, prolonged or frequent crying, mood changes
- Significant physical changes, such as decline in hygiene, appearing fatigued
- Significant changes in behaviour, i.e. verbally abusive, aggressive
- Overwhelmed to the point that everything is a problem.

These listed behaviours are indicators and familiarity with the distressed person will better inform you on appraisal on an evolving incident. Whether you have prior knowledge or not of the distressed person the incident must be taken seriously. In these circumstances you can only offer appropriate support, while ensuring you do not put your own safety at risk.

Remember

- **It is important for staff to realise that we cannot take personal responsibility for the actions of others. We can only do our best to ensure that staff and our customers are supported to the greatest extent possible by ensuring that guidelines are in place for reference.**
- **Staff cannot and are not expected to be in a position to have the expertise to clinically assess the behaviour of others and / or the suicidal intention of a person who may appear to be in crisis or the potential for threatening behaviour.**

This Department's aim is to inform colleagues / customers of supports available, be supportive to the colleague / customer and staff members who experience such an incident and to have a co-ordinated and effective response by all staff in our organisation.

3.0 Risk Assessment for Threatening/Violent/Distressing Incidents

A risk assessment of the potential for threatening behaviour or violent incidents should be conducted as appropriate to the workplace i.e. staff location, public office, interview area, farm visit, fishery harbour, third party premises. The risk assessment should consider the hazards and risks, be it physical surroundings or customer dependant. From the risk assessment certain controls can be identified. It must be borne in mind that situations will arise where a set of controls cannot be devised or would not be applicable. The aim of this policy is to manage the level of exposure more effectively.

The following are examples of practical controls which can be implemented :

- It is important that each member of staff assesses the risk of violence to themselves and others as they undertake their duties. **Appendix A** contains a chart, which is designed for personal use by an employee. It depicts common sense action, which should be taken before commencing any part of day-to-day work.
- Identify situations where employees may be exposed to violence. Where it is anticipated that there may be difficulty dealing with a customer, the case should be discussed in advance with management to decide if it is more appropriate for two staff to deal with the particular customer.
- To avoid possible confrontational situations, consideration should be given to a change of environment when dealing with some cases e.g. use a private interview room, ask the customer to call to the office rather than visit them, etc.
- Develop procedures on what to do in the event of an emergency. Staff must be briefed on these procedures (example given in **Appendix B**).
- Consider the installation of panic buttons. Staff should know the location of the panic button(s) in the office and know where the panic button is connected to.
- Identify an area as a safe refuge for staff in the event of a threatening situation.
- Consider CCTV. If CCTV is already in place check that the CCTV is in good working order and the recording facility is fully operational and signage is in place to this effect.
- Arrange for training on how to deal with aggressive customers / colleague.

4.0 Types of Incidents

The place and type of incident which could occur will vary. To assist you to better understand and to manage, guidelines on the main types of incidents are set out under **Points 9 to 15 in the Guidelines**. These include the following:-

- Dealing with an incident during farm and third party visit / inspection
- “Face to Face” contact with a distressed customer in a Department office / location
- Telephone incident
- Dealing with written correspondence from distressed persons
- Dealing with a protest group
- Coping with a colleague who threatens suicide / self harm / threatening behaviour
- Incident outside of the workplace and related to work.

5.0 Self Care After an Incident

- Dealing with a threatened suicide can be an intense and stressful experience. You may feel emotionally drained and physically exhausted afterwards. Take time to debrief by talking with a colleague or line manager. If you are upset, do not attempt to drive – make alternative travel arrangements which suit you.
- Manage your boundaries. This person is a colleague / customer and while you wish to be supportive and helpful you are not responsible for them and any action they might take. A threatened, attempted or actual suicide is never someone else’s fault.
- Seek assistance from the (CSEAS) if necessary.

The number for CSEAS is 076 100 0030 and the email is: cseas@per.gov.ie

5.1 After a violent incident has occurred:

- Staff should contact their line manager as soon as possible after an incident. In doing so it will inform the next appropriate course of action that should be taken as a consequence of the incident.
- Line managers should be careful to avoid diminishing or dismissing the impact of an incident on an affected staff member or members, nor should they unnecessarily overstate or escalate the perceived impact of the incident on an affected staff member or members.
- Staff with the support of their line manager may need to contact the Garda Síochána, if appropriate after an incident.
- In order to document the risk and minimise the chance of re-occurrence, when assessing the situation, contributory factors should be taken into account that might have exacerbated the situation leading to the act of aggression. The risk assessment for the particular area should be reviewed and updated accordingly.
- Reported incidents should be appropriately reviewed. Care should be taken that the review is objective and impartial. Line managers should be careful to avoid assigning or imputing any direct or indirect blame to an affected staff member or members.
- Staff must report and record the incident to relevant line management who will report to relevant parties, as necessary (i.e. Health and Safety Section, Services Division, Human Resources, Press Office and the State Claims Agency).
- A copy of the report form should be retained locally. The incident should be considered when preparing future risk assessments for the office, for briefing newly assigned staff or for reference for staff preparing to interview customers in the office or visiting their homes. Relevant information should only be recorded (hearsay or opinion should not be noted).²
- Staff will be supported by management if they want / need to access any available counseling, as soon as practicable following a violent incident.
- The line manager should ensure that all help and support, including medical assistance, transport home etc. is available for any staff member affected by an incident of abuse.
- The officer's line manager should make contact with CSEAS / Human Resources if appropriate to establish any other supports to which may be available.
- The effects of an incident may vary widely from one individual to another and line management should endeavour to be conscious of this aspect in respect of their staff. They should be sympathetic, supportive, helpful and understanding and should monitor staff who have been exposed to serious abuse or threats. At an appropriate time they should discuss the matter further with the individual(s) concerned to ensure they have recovered from the incident. Line managers should be careful to avoid diminishing or dismissing the impact of an incident on an affected staff member or members, nor should they unnecessarily overstate or escalate the perceived impact of the incident on an affected staff member or members.
- It is suggested that line managers have personal contact numbers and/or addresses for staff reporting to them and that staff be given the contact number of their immediate line managers. This allows for contact to be made where an incident develops outside of normal working hours involving a work related issue.

NOTE: This provision is voluntary but is recommended to ensure that a member of management is available where a difficult situation arises. Such contact details must be treated as strictly confidential.

² This is important for legal reasons for example slander. The Freedom of Information Act will allow members of the public the right to access records held by Government Departments and certain public bodies.

5.2 Remember, if you have contact with a person in a distressed state

- ✓ Remain calm and confident
- ✓ Take the threat seriously
- ✓ Listen to and empathise with the person
- ✓ Advise the caller to seek help from family GP, out of hours GP, their local emergency department or support organisation
- ✓ Do not promise confidentiality: tell the caller you will have to inform your line manager.

6.0 Role of Line Manager

6.1 Dealing with staff in the aftermath of an incident

- Deal with a person in a distressed state if asked to do so by the staff member
- Alert the staff member's management of the incident
- Arrange for a debriefing with the staff member and local management as soon as possible after the incident, and provide support for the staff member in each case
- Record all such incidents.

The staff member's line manager should perform this function as best they can, using this document for guidance.

- The line manager will ensure that the staff member receives appropriate support from their local management. The staff member should be advised of the availability of the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) in every case.
- The line manager should meet with the staff member and local management as soon as possible after the incident to allow the staff member discuss the incident and its effect on them. Again, at this meeting, the staff member should be informed of the availability of the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service.
- The effects of an incident may also vary widely from one individual to another and line management should endeavour to be conscious of this aspect in respect of their staff. The line manager should be helpful and understanding and monitor staff who have been the subject of serious abuse or threats. At an appropriate time they should discuss the matter further with the member of staff concerned to ensure they have recovered from the incident.
- It is suggested that line managers have contact numbers and/or addresses for staff reporting to them and that staff be given the number of their immediate line managers. This allows for contact to be made where an incident develops outside of normal working hours involving a work related issue. This provision is voluntary but is recommended to ensure that a member of management is available where a difficult situation arises. Such contact details must be treated as strictly confidential.
- Line managers should also be supported by their line managers, where they have been affected by the incident.
- The line manager can also contact the CSEAS for support.

6.3 Referrals to the CSEAS

The line manager/HR may:

- i) suggest to the member of staff involved that s/he may contact the CSEAS for support, or

- ii) make a formal referral³ of the member of staff involved to the CSEAS

If the member of staff is being formally referred to the CSEAS, the Incident Report can be sent to the CSEAS together with an email or the CSEAS Formal Referral Form. The email should include a request to the relevant Employee Assistance Officer to contact the staff member involved offering the support of the CSEAS.

6.4 Record all Incidents

The line manager should report all incidents to the Health and Safety Section and submit to the line manager's superior in the office and to the relevant EAO in the CSEAS if a formal referral is being made.

Reminder

It is hoped that incidents of this nature will occur very infrequently and it is important for us all to realise that we cannot take personal responsibility for the actions of others. We can only do our best to ensure that staff and our customers are supported to the greatest extent possible by ensuring that the above guidelines are in place for reference. Staff cannot and are not expected to be in a position, or have the expertise, to clinically assess suicidal behaviour of a person who may appear to be in crisis.

Our aim is to inform colleagues / customers of supports available, to be supportive to the colleague / customer and staff members who experience such an incident and to have a co-ordinated and effective response by all staff in our organisation.

A person involved in an incident may be a customer and, while you wish to be supportive and helpful, you are not responsible for them or any action they might take. A threatened, attempted or actual suicide is never someone else's fault.

While staff are required to adopt a helpful and supportive approach in all circumstances your own personal safety and that of any colleagues in your presence is the primary concern.

7.0 Supports for Staff

7.1 Civil Service Employee Assistance Service

If appropriate, the line manager should make direct contact with the Employee Assistance Officer notifying them of the incident and those person(s) involved. To make an appointment or arrange a telephone consultation with a Civil Service Employee Assistance Officer in any region or for general enquiries contact can be made with the CSEAS as follows:

Central Telephone Number: 076 1 000 030

Email: CSEAS@per.gov.ie website: www.cseas.per.gov.ie

Write to: CSEAS, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 3rd Floor, St Stephens Green House, Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin.

³ details on confidentiality, the exceptions thereto, referral options and the CSEAS formal referral template are available on the CSEAS website www.cseas.per.gov.ie

7.2 Training

The Department's Learning and Development Unit has courses to up-skill you to cope with the general types of incidents which may arise. Applications for training should be approved by your manager and then forwarded to the Learning and Development Unit.

7.3 Further information

Further general information on these issues may be of interest to you:-

- **National Office for Suicide Prevention [NOSP] -**
www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/Mental_Health_Services/NOSP
Head Office: 01-6201670
- **Samaritans**
www.samaritans.org/your-community/samaritans-ireland-scotland-and-wales/samaritans-ireland
Support Line: - 116123
- **AWARE**
www.aware.ie/
Support Line: - 1800 80 4848
- **Pieta House**
www.pieta.ie/
Support Line: - 1800 247 247
- **Farm and Rural Stress Helpline**
www.hse.ie/Farm_Rural_Stress_Helpline_A_Lifeline_For_Rural_People
Helpline: - 1800 742 745
- **Your Mental Health**
www.yourmentalhealth.ie/
Support Line: - SAMARITANS 116123
- **Health and Safety Authority Ireland [HSA]**
Head Office: - LoCall 1890 289.289
Violence at Work
www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications_and_Forms/Publications/Occupational_Health/Violence_at_Work.pdf
Work related stress
www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications_and_Forms/Publications/Occupational_Health/Work_Related_Stress_A_Guide_for_Employers.pdf
- **REACHOUT**
Helping you get through tough times
www.ie.reachout.com/
Head Office: - 01-7645666
- **Building Personal Resilience**
www.cseas.per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Building-Personal-Resilience.pdf
- **safeTALK & ASIST [Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training]**
www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/Mental_Health_Services/NOSP/Training/
Head Office: - 01-6201670

➤ **Suicide or survive [Wellness]**

www.suicideorsurvive.ie

Head Office: - LoCall 1890 577.577 or 01-2722158

8.0 Frequently Asked Questions

8.1 What if a person wants to leave and doesn't wish to receive medical assistance?

You cannot detain a person against their will. If they wish to leave, you cannot stop them. You should advise the local Garda Síochána and your line manager.

You can encourage them to avail of the help that is available to them through their G.P., their local hospital's Emergency Department, the Samaritans, AWARE or Rural Stress Helpline.

8.2 What if a person attempts self harm / suicide in front of me?

- Call for emergency medical assistance (ambulance service).
- Alert your line manager
- Talk with the person in a calm tone until help arrives.
- Do not put yourself, colleagues or members of the public at risk by attempting to struggle with the person.
- If in physical danger, leave immediately and alert others to clear the work area and call the Garda Síochána.

8.3 What if I believe that the person is using the threat of suicide in order to manipulate me in some way?

Every threat of suicide should be taken seriously, even if it is linked with some form of manipulation (e.g. "unless you do this I will kill myself and it will be your fault"). In such situations:

- Say how much you regret that they feel that way (empathise).
- Tell them that they need immediate medical help (medical assistance) and that you can help them make arrangements to see their Doctor straight away.
- Ask them if there is someone you can contact on their behalf.
- You can contact Social Services to ensure that they get follow-up support.

Ultimately, you are not responsible for any decision made by another person.

9.0 Guidelines for Different Types of Incidents

For ease of reference this section of the guidelines is divided into the following categories:-

9.1 Dealing with an incident during a farm and third party visit / inspection

9.2 "Face to Face" contact with distressed customer in a Department office / location

9.3 Telephone incident

9.4 Dealing with written correspondence from distressed persons

9.5 Dealing with a protest group

9.6 Coping with a colleague who threatens suicide / self harm / threatening behaviour

9.7 Incident outside of the workplace and related to work

The following advice is shown by category to assist with the ease of reference should you need to consult the guidelines in an emergency situation/at time of incident.

9.1 Dealing With an Incident During a Farm or Third Party Premises Visit/Inspection

9.1.1 PRE VISIT/INSPECTION PREPARATION:-

- An officer, in conjunction with his/her line manager, should carry out a risk assessment of the likelihood that they may be subject to violence or abusive behavior from a customer. Supervisory staff who issue files for inspection or other queries requiring a site visit should be mindful of the fact that the Department may have had difficulties in dealing with this individual in the past i.e. there may have been a penalty or an incident at a previous inspection. Before visiting a farm staff should ensure that the inspection process is complied with and is appropriate to the farm support scheme.
- Where there is a history of problems and the risk assessment deems that there are uncontrolled risks, and then the supervisor must take precautionary actions along the lines below.
- In certain instances and based on available information the case / file may be managed in the following manner:-
 - Assigned to a different experienced officer
 - A supervisor accompany the officer at the inspection
 - Having two officers carry out the inspection, depending on the circumstances or
 - Arrange an alternative meeting place

When considering these options consideration should also be given to not including staff in the case that live within the same locality as the farmer.

- If the customer is not known to the inspecting officer, they should seek advice from local staff, if possible, as to any previous incidents or events involving the customer and the Department. If the customer has a known history of being difficult or challenging, discuss the options, as outlined above with line management.
- The notification to a customer of an impending inspection is dependent on the relevant scheme procedures. Some inspections have to be carried out unannounced and the guidance in the procedures manual must be followed. In general, notification of an impending inspection should be given, if scheme rules allow.

NOTE: - A Risk assessment is not static and should be reviewed regularly in light of local circumstances and events.

9.1.2 Dealing with an incident during a visit / inspection

- It may be appropriate for staff carrying out field inspections to complete a risk assessment with the Applicant/owner/farmer prior to the inspection to identify known risks on the premises.
- Staff should recognise the limits of their own ability to deal with a situation, and the time when it becomes prudent to leave.
- Staff will put their own safety first.
- If at an inspection, the farmer is not threatening but reacts in an abusive manner it is best to let him/her say what they want to say. Abusive behaviour / manner may include the usage of swear words, disrespectful language, deliberately stepping into the person's personal space as a form of intimidation.
- Do not interrupt them as it will only inflame the situation.
- If staff are confident that the aggression is not directed towards themselves personally, and that the person simply needs to 'let off steam' at someone about their situation, staff should allow the person to have their say, try to calm them down and encourage the customer to discuss ways in resolving the problems related to the official visit.

- Staff may, if judged appropriate and safe to do so, inform the customer that any further disrespect will not be tolerated and that the customer's case may be referred to more senior managers for processing with the possibility of the inconvenience of meetings at places other than the farm.
- The customer should be advised that the meeting will be terminated if the abuse does not cease immediately. The attention of the customer should be directed to the customer complaints procedures, and alternative sources of help if appropriate.
- Staff should call for assistance from a line manager or where necessary an Garda Síochána, using agreed local procedures if appropriate (see Appendix B).
- If during an inspection a farmer/customer acts in a threatening manner then the officer should not engage with him/her or put himself / herself at risk and leave the premises immediately.
- The officer should immediately contact his/her supervisor and if having discussed the matter a view is formed that the farmer is a danger to himself/herself or others, then the Garda Síochána should be informed.
- Where circumstances permit, and it is deemed appropriate, the supervisor should allow a day or two to pass and phone the applicant. Depending on the applicant's attitude, it may be possible to gain his/her confidence to allow the inspection to be completed. Where it is possible to carry out the inspection, the supervisor should accompany the officer at the inspection.
- Depending on the circumstances, the officer may be able to empathise with the farmer, e.g. illness in the family, recent bereavement, loss of animals with disease, loss of payment at an earlier inspection etc. and gain his/her confidence.
- If there are no time issues, it may be possible to defer the inspection to a time and date in agreement with the farmer. If it is an inspection under an EU Scheme with inspection deadlines and the applicant has calmed down, explain the reason for the inspection and outline that it is in his/her interest that the inspection is completed so that the payments can be made on the due dates. If he/she still has doubts then the officer should try and get the message across that no payment can issue until the inspection is completed. Experience has shown that in most cases the applicant reconsiders and allows the inspection to proceed.
- Where the applicant has refused to allow the inspection to take place the officer should inform his / her supervisor immediately of the occurrence and the difficulty, if known, the farmer has with the inspection. If appropriate, the supervisor should ring the applicant the following day to check that he/she is okay and where appropriate empathise with him / her. He/she must again set out the need to have the inspection completed or the payments will not be made.

9.1.3 Dealing with an Incident involving a Serious Injury to Customer/Member of the Public

- If a customer / member of public / injures themselves, either unintentionally or through self harm, the member of staff present should assess the situation. If it is a self harm incident the Emergency Services should be contacted immediately by telephoning 999 or 112 for assistance The Garda Síochána should also be alerted.
- Staff should call for assistance from a line manager or where necessary an Garda Síochána, using agreed local procedures if appropriate **(see Appendix B)**.
- In any incident where a person is in possession of a weapon [i.e. gun, knife] the Emergency Services should be informed so as to safe guard them against any potential harm.

9.1.4 Dealing with a threat of suicide/self harm

If an individual threatens suicide / self harm, a number of general guidelines apply:

- **Preferably, don't leave the suicidal person on their own** (unless you feel physically threatened yourself).
- The distressed person may insist on leaving without accepting any support. This is a sensitive situation as the person has the right of exit. In such circumstances every effort should be made to ensure that the distressed person is put in the care of a family member, physician or hospital emergency services.
- **A person in such a situation needs immediate medical/counselling help** – your focus should be on encouraging them to seek it, or if currently attending a doctor, to contact him/her immediately.
- **At all times be supportive** – take the person seriously; do not minimise what they are saying; don't attempt to argue or rationalise; don't attempt to counsel/offer advice.

Where a strong view is formed that the person is a danger to himself/herself or others, then the Garda Síochána should be informed and be advised by them.

Contain the Situation

- Take the assertion seriously – do not attempt to judge how “real” the threat actually is.
- Stay calm yourself – do not allow yourself to panic or react emotionally.
- Get assistance from a colleague and have your colleague alert your line manager to the incident. Tell them of the situation you are dealing with. Your colleague, on your behalf, can then contact the Garda Síochána.
- Empathise with the person; show them that you're listening and that you're taking them seriously.
- Some phrases which show you've heard what they're saying will help:
“I'm sorry to hear that you feel that way”;
“I can see how upset you are”;
“It sounds like you're having a very difficult time at the moment”;
- Reassure them that it's ok to talk about it if they wish – *“it's ok, take your time”* – Let them talk. **Just Listen.**

Attend to their immediate Physical Needs

- Ask them if they would like some water/tea/coffee/tissues.
- If the person is visibly upset or is in a very public area, find a private room for you both nearby and invite them to use that as they may feel more comfortable there.
- Should a person be extremely upset, ask your line manager to step in and be with you both. Allow the person be upset/angry/emotional – remain with them, providing reassurance and support.

Remember: Should a member of the public or a colleague engage in behaviour which threatens the physical safety of you, your other colleagues or members of the public, you should leave the premises, immediately contact your supervisor and if having discussed the matter a view is formed that the person is a danger to himself/herself or others, then the Garda Síochána should be informed.

Further Assistance

- When the person is calm, tell them that you would like to ensure that they get immediate medical assistance. Ask them for the name of their Doctor/G.P. and contact them – tell them about the suicide threat and the person's current emotional state. Ask the Doctor what is the next appropriate step – e.g. the Doctor may wish to speak with the person over the phone; they may ask a person's friend/relative/partner/family member to bring the person to their surgery; the Doctor may call an ambulance and ask the person to go to the nearest Accident and Emergency for a psychiatric consultation. Follow the G.P.'s instructions.

- Ask the person if they would like to contact somebody (family member/friend/neighbour), on their behalf.
- Let the contact person know that a suicide threat has been made, what arrangements have been made to get medical assistance, and what they need to do to help with the immediate situation.
- Remain with the person until either a relative/friend/Garda Síochána/GP/emergency service has arrived.
- If the person refuses to give contact information you must rely on the Garda Síochána/emergency service in such cases.

Always record and report such incidents to your line manager and Health and Safety Section

9.1.5 Report All Incidents to Line Manager

Any such incidents should be recorded and reported to your line manager. These should be reported to the Health and Safety Section by using the form NIRF 01 which can be accessed along with further information on the health and safety page on eZone <http://ezone/intranet/businessareas/healthsafety/incidentandhazardreporting/>

9.2 “Face To Face” Contact with a Distressed Customer at a Department Office/Location

Remember: You are not responsible for the actions of the individual. All that you can do is offer appropriate support in a respectful manner.

9.2.1 Dealing with a distressed customer

- Staff will put their own safety first.
- Staff should recognise the limits of their own ability to deal with a situation, and the time when it becomes prudent to leave.
- If staff are confident that the aggression is not directed towards themselves personally, and that the person simply needs to ‘let off steam’ at someone about their situation, staff should allow the person to have their say, calm them down and encourage the customer to discuss ways in resolving the problems related to the official visit.
- Staff may, if judged appropriate and safe to do so, inform the customer that any further disrespect will not be tolerated and that the customer’s case may be referred to more senior managers for processing with the possibility of the inconvenience of meetings at places other than the farm.
- The customer may be reminded of the requirement for mutual respect for conducting business under the Customers Charter of Rights.
- The customer should be advised that the interview/meeting will be terminated if the abuse does not cease immediately. The attention of the customer should be directed to the customer complaints procedures, and alternative sources of help if appropriate.
- Management should be informed of instances of abuse, harassment, threats or intimidation and they in turn should inform the customer that his/her behaviour is unacceptable.
- Staff should call for assistance from a line manager or where necessary an Garda Síochána, using agreed local procedures if appropriate **(see Appendix B)**.

9.2.2 Threat of Suicide/Self Harm

If an individual threatens suicide/self harm, a number of general guidelines apply:

- **Preferably, don’t leave the suicidal person on their own** (unless you feel physically threatened yourself).

- The distressed person may insist on leaving the meeting without any support. This is a sensitive situation as the person has the right of exit. In such circumstances every effort should be made to ensure that the distressed person is put in the care of a family member, physician or hospital emergency services.
- **A person in such a situation needs immediate medical/counseling help** – your focus should be on encouraging them to seek it, or if currently attending a doctor, to contact him/her immediately.
- **At all times be supportive** – take the person seriously; do not minimise what they are saying; don't attempt to argue or rationalise; don't attempt to counsel/offer advice.

Where a strong view is formed that the person is a danger to himself/herself or others, then the Garda Síochána should be informed.

9.2.3 Contain the Situation

- Take the assertion seriously – do not attempt to judge how “real” the threat actually is.
- Stay calm yourself – do not allow yourself to panic or react emotionally
- Get assistance from a colleague and have your colleague alert your line manager to the incident. Tell them of the situation you are dealing with. Your colleague, on your behalf, can then contact the Garda Síochána.
- Empathise with the person; show them that you're listening and that you're taking them seriously.
- Some phrases which show you've heard what they're saying will help:

“I'm sorry to hear that you feel that way”;

“I can see how upset you are”;

“It sounds like you're having a very difficult time at the moment”

- Reassure them that it's ok to talk about it if they wish – *“it's ok, take your time”* – Let them talk. **Just Listen.**

9.2.4 Attend to their immediate Physical Needs

- Ask them if they would like some water/tea/coffee/tissues.
- If the person is visibly upset or is in a very public area, find a private room for you both nearby and invite them to use that as they may feel more comfortable there.
- Should a person be extremely upset, ask your line manager to step in and be with you both. Allow the person be upset/angry/emotional – remain with them, providing reassurance and support.

Remember: Should a member of the public or a colleague engage in behaviour which threatens the physical safety of you, your other colleagues or members of the public, you should leave the premises, immediately contact your supervisor and if having discussed the matter a view is formed that the person is a danger to himself/herself or others, then the Garda Síochána should be informed.

9.2.5 Further Assistance

- When the person is calm, tell them that you would like to ensure that they get immediate medical assistance. Ask them for the name of their Doctor/G.P. and contact them – tell them about the suicide threat and the person's current emotional state. Ask the Doctor what is the next appropriate step – e.g. the Doctor may wish to speak with the person over the phone; they may ask a person's friend/relative/partner/family member to bring the person to their surgery; the Doctor may call an ambulance and ask the person to go to the nearest Accident and Emergency for a psychiatric consultation. Follow the G.P.'s instructions.
- Ask the person if they would like to contact somebody (family member/friend/neighbour), on their behalf.

- Let the contact person know that a suicide threat has been made, what arrangements have been made to get medical assistance, and what they need to do to help with the immediate situation.
- Remain with the person until either a relative/friend/Garda Síochána/GP/emergency service has arrived.
- If the person refuses to give contact information you must rely on the Garda Síochána/emergency service in such cases.

Always record and report such incidents to your line manager and Health and Safety Section

9.3 Dealing with a Telephone Call from a Distressed Customer

Remember: You are not responsible for the actions of the individual. All that you can do is offer appropriate support in a respectful manner.

Staff who deal with customers by telephone may experience aggression and verbal abuse from a caller.

9.3.1 What to do when a telephone caller is abusive

- When a caller is abusive, you can tell the caller that you are not comfortable with the way they are behaving and ask them to stop; otherwise you will have to terminate the call.
- If the abusive behaviour persists, inform the caller that you are going to terminate the call now as they are abusive, that you will record that you have done this and will report it to your line manager.

9.3.2 What to do when a telephone caller threatens self harm or suicide

- In the event that a staff member receives a telephone call from a customer in an extremely agitated or distressed state, talking about suicidal feelings, staff are advised to follow the guidelines below.

9.3.3 What should the staff member who receives the call say or do?

- **Remain calm and confident**

While crises are often characterised by panic and confusion, acting confidently and calmly will help ease the situation. When someone is distressed, it may help him or her to get assurance from people in authority. Therefore, speak clearly and be aware of the tone of your voice.

- **Take the threat seriously**

Empathise with the caller and say:

“I’m sorry to hear that you feel like this”.

- Ask if there is anyone there with them right now that they can talk with. If not, ask them if there is someone they can call to (e.g. family member, friend or neighbour), or if they would like you to contact someone for them who could call round.

“I do know it’s important that you talk with someone who can help. Is there someone there with you who can help – your spouse, or partner, family member, GP or a support organisation?”

- Get their location – *“where are you calling from?”*

- **Encourage the caller to seek help from family, GP, out of hours GP or their local emergency department or support organisation.**

“I think that what you have said to me is very serious. You are obviously in a great deal of distress.

Though this Department is not a crisis service we will support you to get assistance and I can give you numbers of organisations that will be able to help you.”

“I have some phone numbers here of support services who can listen to you and support you. These are –

- *Samaritans - 116 123*
- *Aware – 1890 303 302*
- *Farm and Rural Stress Helpline 1800 742 645*

Please phone one of these to talk about what’s going on.”

- If you feel it is appropriate, agree their next steps with them – what will they do next (go to doctor, visit friend)
- If you have agreed to contact another person, do so as soon as possible after the call ends. Be clear about who you are, the reason for your call and what the person has agreed. The family member/friend who you speak to may themselves be distressed by what you are telling them so try to stay calm.
- **Do not promise confidentiality – tell the caller you will have to inform your line manager**
- In cases where persons threaten suicide, confidentiality is often inappropriately offered as a token of trust.
- *“Because of the nature of this call and the fact that you are distressed, I’m going to have to inform my line manager.”*
- If this is said, the caller may realise that what was meant to be a threat or letting off steam is being taken seriously. The caller might, therefore, reconsider what they have said and the conversation may be able to continue in a calmer vein.
- However if the situation is not diffused, and the staff member taking the call is still worried about the health, safety and wellbeing of the customer, add: *“I’m sorry that I’m not able to help you with this. I’d really like you to talk with one of my line managers. Is it okay for me to call one of my line managers over to talk with you about this?”*
- The staff member should contact their line manager.
- If the caller cannot or will not provide you with a name of someone to contact a family member/ GP, let them know you can’t hold this burden alone. You need to let someone else know. You would prefer if they could choose who to contact, but if they can’t give you a name, you will have to contact the Garda Síochána, out of concern for their safety.
- If the caller hangs up after threatening suicide and before agreeing a course of action, contact the Garda Síochána advising them of the call and of any details you may have i.e. phone number [landline/mobile], person’s location, home address. This information should only be given to the Garda Síochána in the circumstances as described above and not to any other parties.

9.3.4 Support from Line manager

If the line manager has been brought in by a staff member, they should repeat the dialogue outlined above, encourage the individual to seek support from family, GP, emergency department, support organisation.

9.4 Dealing with Written Correspondence from a Distressed Customer

Should you receive a letter, email or text from a distressed customer, you should report correspondence of this nature to your line manager. The customer should be contacted by phone (or email if you have no phone number) as soon as possible, saying the following: *“I have received your letter/email/text and we will be corresponding with you in writing regarding the business aspects of your query shortly. However, regarding the other issue you mentioned, have you someone with you there that you can talk to, or is there someone you can visit, family, your GP for example, or are you aware of the following contact number that you can call to talk –*

- Samaritans - 116 123
- Aware – 1890 303 302
- Farm and Rural Stress Helpline 1800 742 645

All such incidents should be recorded and reported to the line manager and to Health and Safety Section.

9.5 Dealing with a Protest Group

The following procedures are advised for the safety of all persons [staff and protestors] and of the property. By controlling the event there should be minimal disruption to the staff and a safe work environment is maintained.

- In the event of a protest, whether notified in advance or not, Services Division should be notified immediately. The Press Office will then be kept informed of developments by Services Division.
- The person responsible for building [PRB] for that location should arrange safe access and exit routes for staff and customers. A senior manager at the location, and preferably familiar with the topic under protest, must act a liaison officer and keep in communication with the Department Press Office and PRB person.
- The Garda Síochána for that locality should be informed of the protest and alerted to the occupation of any part of the premises. In these circumstances the advice of the Garda Síochána should be prioritised for the safety of all persons. Should any protesters leave the building, they should not be allowed to re-enter.
- Every effort should be made to ensure that the protesters are confined to the reception area. All access doors to offices, toilets, canteens, etc should be secured from the protestors.
- During this event staff should leave/enter the building under instruction from the PRB person/ Services Division.
- The liaison person should record and report the incident to Services Division and Health and Safety Section.
- As with any incident of a threat to a staff member it should be reported immediately to the staff member's line manager and recorded by the liaison person. The line manager should issue a separate incident report for that staff member.

9.6 Dealing with a Colleague who Threatens Suicide/ Self-Harm /Threatening Behaviour

- Where a staff member expresses suicide intention/self harm, you should call for assistance from a line manager or other colleagues. Follow the procedures outlined in Appendix B.
- The manager in situ should inform Human Resources [HR] immediately. If contact cannot be made with HR the manager/colleague who is assisting you should make direct contact with the **Civil Service Employee Assistance Service at telephone number 076 1 000 030** for advice and support on how to manage this situation, as not all threats of suicide are the same.
- **Do not put your safety at risk.**
- Take the assertion seriously, empathise with the staff member e.g. illness in the family, recent bereavement, etc to gain his/her confidence. Some phrases which show you've heard what they're saying will help:
 - *"I'm sorry to hear that you feel that way";*
 - *"I can see how upset you are";*
 - *"It sounds like you're having a very difficult time at the moment"*
- Reassure them that it's ok to talk about it if they wish – *"it's ok, take your time"* – Let them talk. **Just Listen.**

- If there are signs of aggression associated with the intent to self harm / suicide and it is not directed towards you personally, and that the officer simply needs to 'let off steam' at someone about their situation, you should allow the person to have their say, let the officer express themselves without fear of judgment. This may assist in calming the situation.
- **At all times be supportive** – take the person seriously; do not trivialise what they are saying; don't attempt to argue or rationalise; don't attempt to counsel/offer advice.
- Do not interrupt the officer as it may only inflame the situation.
- Ask the person if they would like to contact somebody (family member/friend/neighbour), on their behalf.
- Let the contact person know that a suicide threat has been made, discuss arrangements for the person's care and seek input from the contact person on how they could assist with the immediate situation.
- Subject to the advice of the Employee Assistance Officer and Human Resources, if and when the person becomes calm and comfortable, tell them that you would like to ensure that they get immediate medical assistance. Ask them for the name of their Doctor/G.P. and contact them – tell them about the suicide threat and the person's current emotional state. Ask the Doctor what is the next appropriate step – e.g. the Doctor may wish to speak with the person over the phone; they may ask a person's friend/relative/partner/family member to bring the person to their surgery; the Doctor may call an ambulance and ask the person to go to the nearest hospital's Emergency Department for a psychiatric consultation. Follow the G.P.'s instructions.
- **Preferably, don't leave the suicidal person on their own** (unless you feel physically threatened yourself).
- In any incident where a person is in possession of a weapon [i.e. gun, knife] the Emergency Services should be informed immediately so as to safe guard yourself and the Emergency Services staff from any potential harm.
- Where a strong view is formed that the person is an immediate danger to himself / herself or others, then the Garda Síochána should be informed without delay and be advised by them.
- The distressed officer may insist on leaving at some stage of the incident without support. This is a sensitive situation as the person has the right of exit. In such circumstances every effort should be made to ensure that the distressed person is put in the care of a family member, physician or hospital emergency services.
- **A person in such a situation needs immediate medical/counseling help** – your focus should be to calm the situation and to wait for assistance and advice on the next course of action.
- **Attend to their immediate physical needs.** Ask them if they would like some water/tea/coffee/tissues.
- If possible source a nearby office and offer the person the option of using the office to protect their privacy.
- If the person is extremely upset, ask your line manager/other colleague to step in and be with you both. Allow the person be upset/angry/emotional – remain with them, providing reassurance and support.
- Ask the person if they would like to contact somebody (family member/friend/neighbour), on their behalf.
- Let the contact person know that a suicide threat has been made, what arrangements have been made to get medical assistance, and what they need to do to help with the immediate situation.
- Remain with the person until a relative/friend/Garda Síochána/GP/Emergency Service has arrived.
- If the person refuses to give contact information you must rely on the Employee Assistance Officer/ Garda Síochána/Emergency Service in such cases.
- Always record and report such incidents to your line manager and Health and Safety Section.

The completed report should be forward via your line manager to Health and Safety Section using the form NIRF 01 which can be accessed along with further information on the health and safety page on eZone <http://ezone/intranet/businessareas/healthsafety/incidentandhazardreporting/> .

All reports are handled on a confidential basis.

9.7 Incident Outside of the Workplace and Related to Work

Violence or threat of violence in the workplace is an issue of grave concern for employees and employers alike. The employer's duty is to provide a safe place of work for employees and to have in place measures to prevent or minimise the risk of assaults and of threatening behaviour.

Instances may arise outside of the workplace where an employee may be approached by an irate customer of the Department or work colleague and be threatened with violence, intimidation and/or verbal abuse arising from a work related issue. In such instances the employee should inform the irate person that any work related issue should be discussed in the employee's workplace and not engage in further discussion on the matter.

The employee should notify the Garda Síochána of the incident and also his/her line manager as soon as possible. In the event that the property of the employee and/or the employer is damaged as a result of intimidation or violence the incident must be reported to the Garda Síochána and to one's line manager. Reported incidents will be reviewed by Human Resources and dealt with on a case by case basis.

Appendix A

Assessing personal safety

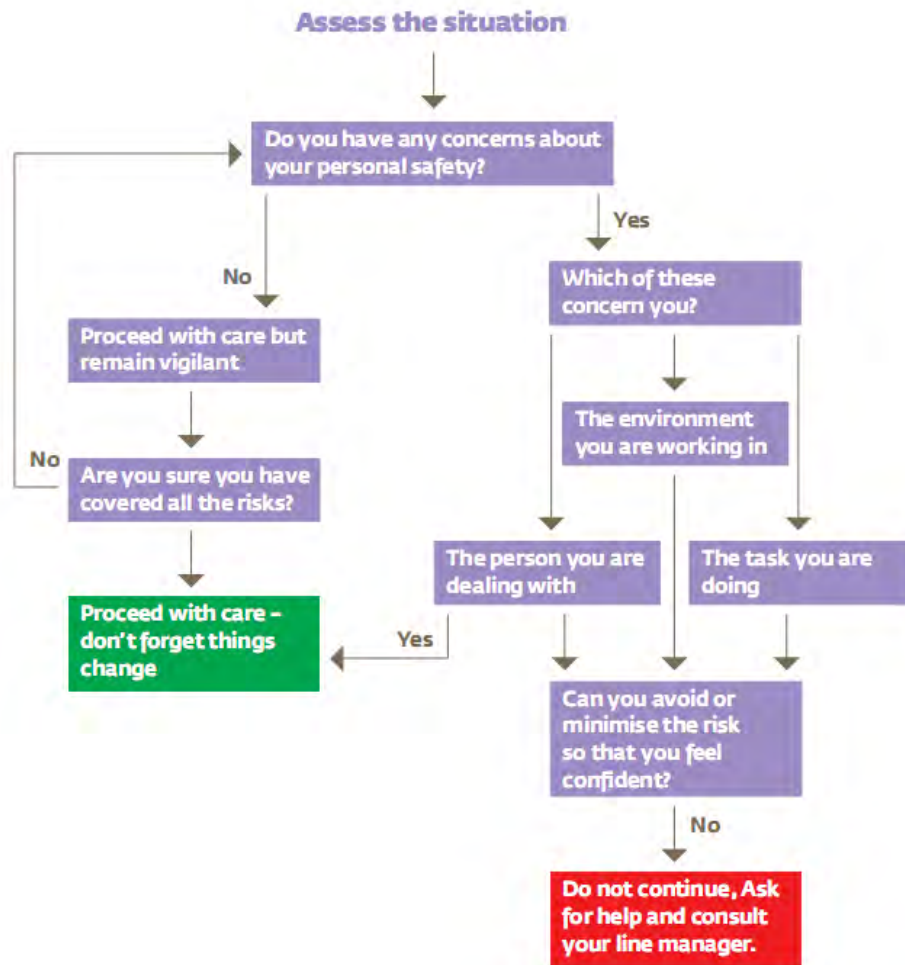


Figure 1- Chart developed by Suzy Lamplugh Trust

Appendix B – Procedure in event of potentially threatening or violent Incident

XXX Office

112/999

Local Garda Síochána Station	
Designated Person(s) to contact The Garda Síochána	
Garda Síochána Station Direct Tel No.	
Internal Arrangements	
Emergency Contact Internal Extension Number	
Agreed “ <i>Safety Phrase</i> ” In event of potential violent situation	“XXXXXXXX”
Area Of Safe Refuge	
First Aider Name & Contact Numbers	

In event of a potentially threatening or violent incident staff should: (Amend per local arrangements)

- Raise the alarm
 - To line manager.
 - To colleague (where necessary use agreed “Safety Phrase), who in turn will raise alarm to line manager;
- Line manager must firstly evaluate the situation prior to any action being taken.
- If the situation is felt to be volatile, the Garda Síochána should be notified.
- Contact Garda Síochána (112 or 999); give your name, address, contact telephone number and a description of the incident.
- In the event of a situation, access for non staff should be confined to the reception area, if possible and all access doors to offices, toilets, canteens etc should be kept locked.
- Line manager should liaise with Garda Síochána upon their arrival and brief them on the incident.
- All other staff shall co-operate with any instructions given from the line manager/supervisor.
- If the situation escalates management should direct staff: to seek refuge in the designated safe area or; to evacuate the building through identified safe exits.
- Remain in that area until instructed otherwise by the supervisor or Garda Síochána.