

Sergeant Michael Turner, Leading Senior Constable Cam Miller and Senior Constables Courtney O'Brien and Will Harvey



CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE TEAM

The new look FRU

Gone are the days when the Force Response Unit was mobilised to deal with demonstrators or to assist in special operations in the suburbs. Today the FRU could be renamed the Critical Incident Response Unit. Members have undergone additional training and they are on patrol to assist with dangerous incidents across the metropolitan area.

A service gap was identified between general duties policing and the Special Operations Group. The Critical Incident Response Teams (CIRTs) turn out to incidents that wouldn't warrant the attendance of the SOG but for which the general duties police are not trained or equipped to deal with, like offenders armed with knives or potential suicides.

The CIRTs also deal with 'white powder' incidents where a suspicious parcel arrives containing white powder. The number of these 'suspect parcels' has increased in recent years with many prominent businesses in Melbourne receiving such items through the post. When those packages appear to be more sinister the Bomb Response Unit is called in.

CIRT is also tasked with responding to threats or perceived threats against consulates or international businesses as identified by the Security Intelligence Group.



Acting Senior Sergeant Adrian Healy

also qualified to carry shotguns and tasers.

The members are equipped with the less lethal 'beanbag rounds' which cause discomfort and distract the offender allowing the members to move closer. These would be used if OC spray isn't successful, or was unable to be used. If these methods fail to subdue an offender the members would use the taser. They do, of course, have lethal capacity with their handguns.

The members also have specialised protective equipment including tactical vests, goggles and thigh holsters. The tactical vests are worn over the members' ballistic vests. All up the equipment weights 18 kilos.

The members of the teams all carry more sophisticated equipment than general duties police. This includes the OC foam, foam in a streamer that gives greater accuracy and a fire extinguisher style instrument, the PRATT device, filled with OC that gives a range of 20 metres. All these are much more practical in difficult situations than the OC spray issued to most members. The CIRT members are

To operate this specialised equipment the members have to undergo additional training and obtain extra qualifications. The training is carried out by FRU trainers and the CIRT course runs for three weeks. There is now also a fitness component in the training and selection process for FRU.

“The day to day duties of the CIRT are more gruelling than those of general duties police,” explains Acting Senior Sergeant Adrian Healy. “We do require a higher level of fitness and that is in the job description. Applicants have to undergo a test at the Academy prior to the interview stage.”

The physical component is not as rigorous as the SOG selection process but members will be required to complete the obstacle course in a specified time, chin ups, push ups and sit ups as well as a timed run. This doesn't preclude women joining the FRU.

There are two CIRT vans and they are on the road 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There is generally a sergeant and three others on each van. Both vans turn out to every job. Of the members on board one or possibly two will be trained negotiators. When they are not being utilised, the members undertake training or conduct general patrols, but are always ready to respond to a call.

“The great thing about CIRT is it gives members more options,” says Adrian Healy. “In the past, when dealing with someone with a knife the only real option was to use lethal force and that's what we don't want. CIRT will attend and take control from the uniform members, put a cordon in place and try to negotiate a satisfactory outcome.”

Once the CIRT have been to an area the local members see the value in using the specially trained unit rather than tying up resources and putting local members in danger. “We will attend and assist the local units. We are better equipped.”

The CIRT patrols are random and when they are out on the road they enforce the road rules and undertake other general duties. They will back up the primary units at crime scenes or traffic accidents. Their response zone is the CBD and surrounding 100 kilometres.

Some members still think of FRU as a bit of a back water but nothing could be further from the truth. The duties offer members variety not available at general duties stations. No longer do they turn out to demonstrations or walk the streets of the suburbs when a visible police presence is needed.



Sergeant Mark Reid, observing Senior Constable Courtney O'Brien, Senior Constable John Bamford and Senior Constable James Schroeter

A lot of the CIRT training is carried out in the Academy's scenario village. There are eight training officers who oversee the training. The members are always honing their skills. As Sergeant Mark Reid puts it, “It is like playing the violin. The members must be so familiar with their tools of trade that it becomes second nature to them. And there is safety in training. If they are familiar with their equipment mistakes don't happen.”

CIRT are there for all members of the Force. Local supervisors or even the van crew can call out the CIRT. Members wanting their assistance or advice can contact them at their VPC office.

Senior Constable Aaron Nummy, Leading Senior Constable Stephen Wigg and Senior Constable Steve Bowman

