

## **CERT Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Q: What is CERT?**

**A:** The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program educates people about disaster preparedness for hazards that may impact their area and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. Using the training learned in the classroom and during exercises, CERT members can assist others in their neighborhood or workplace following an event when professional responders are not immediately available to help. CERT members also are encouraged to support emergency response agencies by taking a more active role in emergency preparedness projects in their community. The About CERT section of this site gives you a complete description of CERT.

### **Q: How does CERT benefit the community?**

**A:** People who go through CERT training have a better understanding of the potential threats to their home, workplace and community and can take the right steps to lessen the effects of these hazards on themselves, their homes or workplace. If a disaster happens that overwhelms local response capability, CERT members can apply the training learned in the classroom and during exercises to give critical support to their family, loved ones, neighbors or associates in their immediate area until help arrives. When help does arrive, CERTs provide useful information to responders and support their efforts, as directed, at the disaster site. CERT members can also assist with non-emergency projects that improve the safety of the community. CERTs have been used to distribute and/or install smoke alarms, replace smoke alarm batteries in the home of elderly, distribute disaster education material, provide services at special events, such as parades, sporting events, concerts and more.

### **Q: Is there a CERT near me?**

**A:** Over 1100 communities and growing have listed their program on the CERT web site under the Directory of CERT Programs by State. You can check the State Directory to see if one is in your community. There also is a web site maintained by Los Angeles City CERT volunteers that has a listing of "Other Team Links".

### **Q: How do we start a CERT program?**

**A:** CERT requires a partnership between community members and local government, emergency management and response agencies. The program does take a commitment of time and resources from all parties. Interested community members should discuss with local government and emergency management officials ways to improve their community's preparedness capability and how they can be involved. The outcome of these discussions can range from education programs to an active training program like CERT that prepares participants to be part of the community's response capability following major disasters. It is also important to develop a plan that covers training, maintenance and activation standards as well as administrative requirements like databases and funding. This plan will act as a guide so that one can evaluate the program and make adjustments.

## **Q: How is the CERT funded?**

**A:** Congress has provided funds through the Citizen Corps program to the States and Territories. Grants from these funds may be available to local communities to start CERT programs. Contact your State Citizen Corps point of contact to learn more about grant possibilities.

Also, there are a variety of local approaches to funding. Some communities build costs into their local budget while others charge participants to attend training to cover costs for instructors and course materials. In a few communities, CERT organizations have formed 501 (C) 3 for non-profit status to allow them to do fundraising and seek corporate donations.

## **Q: Why take the CERT training?**

**A:** Local government prepares for everyday emergencies. However, there can be an emergency or disaster that can overwhelm the community's immediate response capability. While adjacent jurisdictions, State and Federal resources can activate to help, there may be a delay for them getting to those who need them. The primary reason for CERT training is to give people the decision-making, organizational, and practical skills to offer immediate assistance to family members, neighbors, and associates while waiting for help. While people will respond to others in need without the training, the goal of the CERT program is to help people do so effectively and efficiently without placing themselves in unnecessary danger.

A success story about CERTs comes from events during the wildfires in Florida. The Edgewater CERT helped emergency management and the fire department personnel by assisting with evacuation; handling donations; preparing food for firefighters; and answering the phone while the professionals were fighting the fire. This is a great example of CERT members and response personnel working together for the benefit of the community.

## **Q: Who can take the training?**

**A:** Naturals for the training are neighborhood watch, community organizations, communities of faith, school staff, workplace employees, scouting organization and other groups that come together regularly for a common purpose. CERT skills are useful in disaster and everyday life events.

## **Q: How do I take CERT training?**

**A:** To become a CERT member, you will have to take the CERT training from a sponsoring agency like an emergency management agency, fire department or police department in the area where you live or work. Contact the local emergency manager where you live or work and ask about the education and training opportunities available to you. Let this person know about your interest in CERT.

## **Q: What if I want to do more than just the basic training?**

**A:** CERT members can increase their knowledge and capability by attending classes provided by other community agencies on animal care, special needs concerns, donation management, community relations, shelter management, debris removal, utilities control, advanced first aid, Automatic External Defibrillator use, CPR skills, and others. The

sponsoring agency should maintain records of this training and call upon CERT members when these additional skills are needed in the community.

CERT member also can use their skills to help the program flourish by volunteering to schedule events, produce a newsletter, perform administrative work, and take leadership positions.

### **Q: How do CERT members maintain their skills?**

**A:** CERT members and the local sponsoring agency work together to maintain team skills and the working partnership. It is suggested that the sponsor conduct refresher classes and an annual exercise where all CERT members are invited to participate. Some response agencies have conducted joint exercises with CERT teams and operate as they would during an actual disaster. The last point does bring up a lesson learned. Besides training CERT members, it is also important to educate members of response agencies in the community about CERTs, the skills that team members have learned during training and the role that they will have during a major disaster. One way to develop trust between CERT and responders is by encouraging agency personnel to participate in classes as instructors and coaches and in activities with CERT members.

Understanding that CERTs may operate independently following a disaster. CERTs can practice this independence by taking some responsibility for their own training. Teams can design activities and exercises for themselves and with other teams. Some members can be rescuers, some victims, and some evaluators. After the event, there can be a social so that community teams can discuss the exercise and get to know each other.

### **Q: Can someone under age 18 participate?**

**A:** This is a local decision. Someone under 18 should be with a parent or have permission to attend. Some communities have reached out specifically to young people. Winter Springs High School in Florida offers the training to high school students. You can read an article about this. CERT is a great way to address the community service requirements for high school students and provides students with useful skills. CERT also fits nicely with training given to Boy and Girl Scouts and the Civil Air patrol.

### **Q: What if I have concerns about my age or physical ability?**

**A:** There are many jobs within a CERT for someone who wants to be involved and help. Following a disaster, CERT members are needed for documentation, comforting others, logistics, etc. Non-disaster related team activities may include keeping databases, developing a website, writing a newsletter, planning activities, helping with special events and organizing exercises and activities.

During CERT classroom training, if one has a concern about doing a skill like lifting, just let the instructor know. You can learn from watching. We would like everyone who wants to go through the training to have an opportunity to participate and learn the skills. CERT educates participants about local hazards and trains them in skills that are useful during disaster and life's everyday emergencies.

### **Q: What about liability?**

**A:** The text of the Volunteer Protection Act of 1997 is available for viewing. Also there is information about State Liability Laws located on the Citizen Corps website. During training, each sponsoring agency should brief its CERT

members about their responsibilities as a CERT member and volunteer. Finally, there is a job aid on liability for you to review in our Start a CERT Program section.

The CERT material was developed by the Los Angeles City Fire Department and adopted by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 1993. The CERT manual contains basic and straightforward material that has been accepted by those using it as the standard for training.

It is important to remember that the best sources of help in emergencies are professional responders. However, in situations when they are not immediately available, people will want to act and help. We have seen this time and again in our history. CERT training teaches skills that people can use to safely help while waiting for responders. The alternate is to do nothing and that is not in our nature.