

CERT Background Information

CERT Overview

CERTs are formed by members of a neighborhood or workplace who want to be better prepared for the hazards that threaten their communities.

Beyond Disaster Response

Initially, CERT programs were developed to assist communities in taking care of themselves in the aftermath of a major disaster when first responders are overwhelmed or unable to respond because of communication or transportation difficulties. As the CERT concept has taken hold across the country, however, CERTs have become much more than originally envisioned. CERTs have proven themselves to be an active and vital part of their communities' preparedness and response capability. For example, CERTs have been used to:

- Distribute and/or install smoke alarms and batteries to the elderly and disabled.
- Assist with evacuations and traffic control.
- Promote community awareness of potential hazards and preparedness measures.
- Supplement staffing at special events, such as parades.
- Act as victims in training exercises.

CERTs are an investment of local government's time and resources. To capitalize on this investment, program sponsors can view CERT members as a volunteer resource that can assist with public safety activities. Such an approach will actively involve members in serving their communities beyond disaster response and add value to the CERT program.

CERT Standards and Protocols

The best source of help in an emergency or disaster is the paid or volunteer professional responder. But, if they are not available to address immediate life-saving needs or to protect property, CERT members can help. CERTs are not intended to replace a community's response capability, but rather, to serve as an important supplement to it.



The agency sponsoring the CERT program is creating a volunteer resource that is part of the community's operational capability following a disaster. That agency should develop training standards for CERT personnel and protocols for their activation and use.

CERT members must keep their safety in mind as their first priority. CERT volunteers must know their capabilities and the limitations of their training and equipment and work within those limitations.

CERTs do NOT:

- Suppress large fires.
- Enter structures that they consider heavily damaged and dangerous (e.g., leaning or moved from foundation).
- Perform hazardous materials cleanup or respond to incidents involving radiological, chemical, or biological agents.
- Perform medical, fire, or search and rescue operations beyond their level of training.
- Activate or deploy unless called for in their procedures.

CERTs are considered "Good Samaritans" and covered under the Volunteer Protection Act. CERT volunteers do not have any authority beyond serving as "Good Samaritan" when helping others.

When deployed appropriately, however, CERTs can complement and enhance first-response capability in neighborhoods and workplaces by ensuring the safety of themselves and their families working outward to the neighborhood or office and beyond until first responders arrive. CERTs can then assist first-response personnel as directed.

CERT Roles

The Role That CERTs Can Play to Augment Emergency Management and Response Capability Within Their Community



Following a major disaster, first responders who provide fire and medical services will not be able to meet the demand for these services. Click on these links to learn more about the role of CERTs:

CERT Training: Preparing for Emergency Response

Using the basic CERT curriculum, CERT personnel train to prepare for a disaster or overwhelming event by:

- Identifying and mitigating potential hazards in the home and workplace.
- Initiating plans to prepare themselves and their loved ones for the hazards that they face.
- Learning skills to help themselves, loved ones, and neighbors or fellow employees until professional response resources arrive.
- Working cooperatively as a team within their neighborhoods or workplaces.
- Maintaining a relationship with the agency that sponsors the CERT program.
- Participating in continuing education and training.
- Volunteering for projects to enhance the public safety of their communities.
- Understanding their capabilities and limitations when deployed.



During training, CERTs learn to:

- Prepare for the hazards that threaten their communities.
- Apply size-up and safety principles.
- Locate and turn off utilities.
- Extinguish small fires.
- Identify hazardous materials situations.
- Triage and treat victims.
- Set up a medical treatment area.
- Conduct searches and rescues in lightly and moderately damaged structures.
- Understand the psychological impact of a disaster on themselves and others.
- Organize CERT members and spontaneous volunteers for an effective and safe response.
- Apply response skills in a disaster simulation.



Following initial training, the sponsoring agency has the challenge of helping CERT members maintain and improve their skills through a variety of training programs, exercises, and special projects, all tailored at the local level to meet local needs.

CERT Roles During Emergencies

When a disaster or overwhelming event occurs and responders are not immediately available, CERTs can assist by:

- Conducting an initial size-up in their homes or workplaces.
 - Reducing immediate dangers by turning off utilities, suppressing small fires, evacuating the area, and helping others.
 - Treating people in the immediate area.
 - Working with CERT members and volunteers to establish a command post, staging area, and medical triage and treatment areas.
 - Collecting damage information and developing a plan of operation based on life-saving priorities and available resources.
 - Applying their training to situations where CERT members can make a difference.
 - Establishing and maintaining communication with responders.
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Other CERT Roles

Depending on your plan for CERTs, the teams may fill other roles as well. For more information about CERTs and how they are used throughout the country, click on the following articles from the electronic newsletter, "The Connection:"



- [Portland NETs . . . Bigger Than Disaster Response!](#)

All around the United States, fire departments, emergency management professionals and some law enforcement agencies are getting on board with community emergency response team training. In Portland, Oregon, CERT members (called Neighborhood Emergency Teams (NETs)) staff first aid booths at neighborhood fairs and parades; speak at PTA meetings, neighborhood association meetings, and service clubs; and assist Fire Bureau staff at community safety fairs.

- [Mitigation Actions by the Cert Team.](#)
These two mitigation actions were organized and completed by the CERT members of Edgewater. The Fire Department supplied the blue hydrant markers and glue, and CERT did the rest. They asked the homeowners permission to mark their home address on the street curb and for a voluntary donation, and received 100% cooperation. Both these mitigation actions were well received by the residents of Edgewater.
- [CERT Proves to Be Valuable During the Florida Wildfires.](#)
CERT members in the Edgewater area staffed fire stations to answer incoming phone calls, disseminate public information, handle donations, and prepare meals for line personnel.
- [Partnership for Preparedness Semper Paratus.](#)
In a day of shrinking budgets and small staffs, it is difficult for any public safety agency to maintain a high level of preparedness. Detection of wildfires in rural areas still relies on a person scaling a 100-foot tower in the heat of the day to watch for smoke. Alachua County CERTs are used to supplement fire tower staff during fire season.