

The CERT concept was first developed and implemented by the Los Angeles Fire Department in 1985. Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the CERT Program was established across the nation as part of President Bush's Citizen Corps initiative. Since then, more than 1,100 communities have received government grants and started CERT programs of their own.

When any kind of disaster hits small rural communities, the police, fire and medical teams can get overwhelmed so quickly. Clarion County has small communities out in the middle of no man's land. If a catastrophic event were to occur, the professional emergency response resources would first respond to the heavier-populated areas. The residents of these small communities would, basically, be on their own for the first few hours or even days.

Natural disasters such as severe weather, tornadoes, floods and winter storms occur each year in Clarion County. CERT members can give support to first responders, provide immediate assistance to victims and organize spontaneous volunteers at a disaster site. In addition to natural disasters, volunteers are also trained to assist in the event of a chemical, biological or man-made disaster.

**CERT volunteers are not intended to replace professional law enforcement, fire personnel, or emergency medical service providers.** They are designed to stabilize the situation and perform the basics until trained professionals arrive on the scene. Volunteers with willing hands are always needed and can be extremely useful, however, trained emergency responders need to do their work rather than train those who want to help. That's where CERT members step in to organize and direct untrained spontaneous volunteers who arrive at a disaster scene offering assistance.

CERT team members are trained to respond to disasters by turning off utilities when needed, suppressing small fires, treating life-threatening injuries with basic first aid, conducting light search and rescue operations, and helping victims cope with their emotions. CERT is a great way for communities to become more prepared and for citizens to take care of themselves when emergency professionals are not available. These volunteers are vital in providing immediate help to friends and neighbors in their communities.

The CERT program was established in Clarion County in 2003, and is currently under the Citizen Corps Council. The training program is 100% federally funded through grants from FEMA. The Clarion County Citizen Corps Council is under the direction of the Clarion County Office of Emergency Services.

By the end of 2006, Clarion County Citizen Corps had 98 individuals complete our CERT Program. These graduates include residents of Clarion County, as well as residents of Armstrong, Forest, Jefferson, and Venango Counties.