



CERT Support Committee Guide to Basic Principles Frequently Asked Questions

Purpose and Scope:

Provides a variety of questions that are often related to Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) programs and teams and their answer.

Q: What is the history of CERT?

The CERT concept was developed and implemented by the Los Angeles City Fire Department in 1985. The Whittier Narrows earthquake in 1987 underscored the area-wide threat of a major disaster in California. Further, it confirmed the need for training civilians to meet their immediate needs.

In 1993 this training was made available nationally by FEMA. CERT programs are now in all 50 states, including many tribal nations and U.S. territories; each unique to its community but all essential to building a Culture of Preparedness. The CERT program was designed as a grassroots initiative and specifically structured so that the local and state program managers have the flexibility to form their programs in the way that best suits their communities.

Q: What exactly is the CERT program?

The CERT program educates volunteers about disaster preparedness for the 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. CERT offers a consistent, nationwide approach to volunteer training and organization that professional responders can rely on during disaster situations, allowing them to focus on more complex tasks.

The training is an approximately 19 hours long available locally for either jurisdictions to create a team of volunteers that can assist the jurisdiction or to provide citizens in order to take care of themselves and neighbors.

Q: What can CERT teams do in an emergency?

Under the direction of local emergency responders, CERT teams help provide critical support by giving immediate assistance to victims, providing damage assessment information, and organizing other volunteers at a disaster site. In the event of a disaster, when resources are likely to be

overwhelmed and professional response may be delayed, CERT teams can help “bridge the gap” until professional responders are able to arrive on scene.

Q: Who is eligible to take CERT training?

Anyone age 18 and above. Children aged 15-17 years can take the training if accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.

Natural 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.

Q: Why take CERT training?

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 CERT 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. CERT skills are useful in disaster and everyday life events

Q: What Is the Training Format?

Most topics involve instructor-led training using PowerPoint and video. Some topics include hands on training, for example, practicing bandaging each other. A portion of the

training is usually held in a location where you can practice how to put out fires and learn basic search and rescue.

Although the training covers serious topics, the instructors do their best to make sure that everyone has a good time.

Q: Do I have to join a CERT team after I complete the training?

No. We would love to have you join the team but are more than happy for you to leave with the knowledge that you can better help your family and neighbors in an emergency.

Q: Is the training and being a team member safe?

This training is about learning to respond safely and responsibly. You will be outfitted in all necessary safety gear and educated on proper safety procedures. Volunteers are taught and constantly reminded that rescuer safety is the most important thing for CERT members. (You cannot help others if you hurt yourself!) The intent is not to expose you to additional risk; rather, it is to provide you with proper training so you are safely able to help victims during an event when professional responders may be delayed. There are many ways to aid first responders in the aftermath of a disaster. CERT teaches you skillsets that you can apply to help yourself, your family, your neighbors and your community after a disaster strikes.

Q: What is included in the training?

The training consists of nine units; each unit has goals and learning objectives. The units teach you to keep yourself safe while helping others; to identify and anticipate hazards; reduce fire hazards in the home and workplace; use fire extinguishers to put out small fires; assist emergency responders; conduct light search and rescue; set up medical treatment areas; apply basic first aid techniques and help reduce survivor stress. At the end of the course, you'll participate in a disaster drill to reinforce the skills you learn in the training.

Q: How does CERT benefit the community?

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, CERT members 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. CERT teams 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: How much does the training cost?

CERT training is free and open to the community.

Q: Why should I become a CERT team member?

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

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: How do CERT members maintain their skills?

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 CERT teams, 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 CERT may operate independently following a disaster. CERT teams 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: If I take the CERT training, what am I obligating myself to do?

CERT is first and foremost an awareness-level disaster preparedness training. The priority is learning how to take care of yourself, your family, and your neighbors in an emergency. Responding as a CERT is voluntary. Once you have taken CERT Basic Training, you may choose to join a CERT team in your neighborhood, workplace or place of worship.

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

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: Who can sponsor a CERT program?

In Iowa, historically a local public safety agency is a sponsor of a CERT program, typically Emergency Management. Jurisdictions at the city, village, township, county, and regional level generally choose a specific department that the management and implementation of CERT resides. In many

cases, it is within emergency management but there are many who choose to use the police department, fire department, mayor's office, health department, etc. There is no wrong way of doing business in this regard-only what works best for that jurisdiction. It is important to note that CERT training can also exist within non-profit and other organizations. In these cases, the team is typically affiliated with a public safety sponsored CERT program.

Q: How do we start a CERT program or team?

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?

Congress has provided funds through FEMA programs to the States and Territories. Grants from these funds may be available to local communities to start CERT programs. Contact your State CERT 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.