CERT Support Committee
Guide to Basic Principles
CERT Program & Teams

Purpose and Scope:

Provides an overview and guidance for the implementation of Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) programs and teams. (Note: this is not for a single individual taking the training for their personal preparedness.)

Definitions:

This section lists the standard definitions of some terms that will be used in this document.

Term	Definition
CERT	Community Emergency Response Team
CERT Program	The structure to provide CERT training and / or the sponsoring of teams operated by a public safety agency.
CERT Team	A group of people who perform tasks to work toward accomplishing a common mission or specific objective.

Reference Documents:

This section lists reference documents that may be used with this document.

File Title	Description
Starting_and_Maintaining_CERT.pdf	Starting and Maintaining a CERT Program
Workplace_CERT_Starter_Guide.pdf	Workplace CERT Starter Guide, March 2016
Campus_CERT_Starter_Guide.pdf	Campus CERT Starter Guide, October 2015
Teen_CERT_Launch_Maintaintraining.pdf	Teen CERT Guide Launching and Maintaining the Training, March 2012

Related Training:

This section lists available training that may be used with this document.

Training Title	Description
Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program Manager	This course prepares participants to be CERT program managers to effectively manage a CERT program.
	Various aspects of CERT management, including managing volunteers and developing a program plan are covered.

Background:

The Community Emergency Response Team (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.

Citizen Corps is a program under the Department of Homeland Security that provides training for the population of the United States to assist in the recovery after a disaster or terrorist attack. The Iowa Disaster Human Resource Council (IDHRC) is the State of Iowa's Citizen Corps council. Community Emergency Response Teams is a Citizen Corps Partner Program.

By developing the curriculum, training materials and providing high level guidance, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), part of the Department of Homeland Security, supports CERT programs. The CERT Basic Training includes research-validated guidance for CERT programs to teach members what to do before, during, and after the hazards their communities may face.

CERT is a group of people organized as a team that receives special training to enhance their ability to recognize, respond to, and recover from a major emergency or disaster situation. Teams are trained in areas that will help them take care of themselves and others before, during and after a major emergency.

As an organized team, individuals can provide vital services in the absence of and while waiting for the arrival of emergency responders; they often also assist once responders arrive.

How CERT Teams / Programs Operate:

As each team is organized and trained in accordance with standard operating procedures developed by the sponsoring agency, members identify potential meeting locations or staging areas to be used in the event of a disaster or team activation. Activation protocol will be based upon local SOPs.

The staging area is where the public safety agencies and other services will interact with the team. Having a centralized contact point makes it possible to allocate volunteer resources more effectively. This is true for all teams, whether active in a neighborhood, workplace, school, college/university campus, or other venue.

Damage from disasters may vary considerably from one location to another. In an actual disaster, communities will deploy teams as needs dictate. Volunteers should assess their own needs and the priorities of those in their immediate environment first.

CERT volunteers who do not encounter a need in their immediate area should then report to their staging area, and the first volunteer to arrive will become the initial Team Leader (TL) for the disaster response. The TL may pass leadership to someone else as other volunteers arrive. Volunteers who find themselves in a heavily impacted location should send runners to staging areas to get assistance from available resources. Volunteers may use amateur radios or similar technologies to increase communication capabilities and coordination.

CERT teams may also be used to support other events such as fairs, provide preparedness training to the public, city celebrations or other projects their sponsoring agency deploys them to.

CERT trained individuals provide an effective first-response capability. Acting as individuals first, then as team members, trained CERT volunteers can fan-out within their assigned areas, extinguish small fires, turn off natural gas at damaged homes, perform light search and rescue, and render basic medical treatment. CERT teams also act as effective "eyes and ears" for public safety agencies. Trained volunteers also offer an important potential workforce to service organizations in non-hazardous functions such as shelter support, crowd control, and evacuation.

CERT Program:

A CERT program is the local, community level structure that provides training and may establish a formal CERT team. Programs are established by a county public safety agency. They also work with others within their jurisdiction that may establish any of the various CERT team types.

The program develops standard operating procedures, activation, deployment, volunteers, manage liability, marketing CERT, specialized training, etc. They also establish the procedure for working with neighboring programs and team deployment outside the agency's jurisdiction.

Refer to the document Starting a CERT Program Guide for information on starting a CERT program.

Important Note: CERT is not a replacement for public safety agencies, it is only a method to augment their capabilities and prepare individuals to care for themselves until their arrival.

CERT Team Types:

There is more than one way to implement CERT as part of a CERT program. CERT training can be used for the following:

- Formal Team
  - o Basic
  - o Advanced
- Workplace, including
  - o Businesses / Industry
  - o Schools, K-12, community colleges and universities
  - o Places of worship
  - o Clubs and organizations
- Neighborhoods
- Individual preparedness

Formal Team:

A Formal CERT team can support and enhance existing capabilities within a community. CERT volunteers can participate in efforts to increase the preparedness and resilience of the community. Formal CERT teams are designed to operate in the public safety environment. They provide support at various incidents, disasters and public events as examples.

Formal teams can be subdivided into two types: 1) Basic and 2) Advanced.

A basic team's tasks it can perform is limited by the skills covered in the CERT Basic Training program. Advanced teams take additional training to perform specialized functions in support of area needs.

Sponsor:

These teams are created / sponsored by a public safety agency. Goals of the team and what activities the team engages in is under the control of the jurisdiction having authority over the team, in this case the sponsoring public safety agency.

Sample documents are available from the CERT Support Committee for the development of team management documents.

Additionally, best practices are also available from the Committee. A best practice is a document that describes a method or technique that has been generally accepted as superior to any alternatives. This is because it produces results that are superior to those achieved by other means or because it has become a standard way of doing things. It is highly recommended that teams follow any best practices that have been developed.

The jurisdiction having authority over the CERT team has the final authority over any resulting documents based upon any samples or best practices offered by the Committee.

Training:

Recommended training is highly dependent on the teams' function. Refer to the document Continuing Education Guide for information on recommended training.

Deployment:

How and for what activities the team is deployed for within the sponsoring public safety agencies response area is under the control of that agency as they are the jurisdiction having authority over the team.

If the team may be deployed outside of the sponsoring public safety agencies response area, it is recommended that mutual aid or other agreements be in place before the deployment.

If the team may be deployed outside of the state, the deployment be managed through an applicable mutual aid agreement. Additionally, it is recommended that the team members be entered in the National Qualification System (NQS). The members should be resource typed following the NQS Job Titles/Position Qualifications and Position Task Books for the three NQS CERT positions.

Scope of Activities:

The scope of the team's activities is under the control of the jurisdiction having authority over the team. It is the responsibility to ensure that the members of the team have received the proper training and any required certifications needed for the activities the team is involved in.

Additionally, the members of the team that may have additional training and / or certifications that exceed the scope of activities of the team should not perform those functions when operating as a team member.

Workplace Team:

A Workplace team is a generic term used for any team that is sponsored by a businesses or industry, schools such as K-12, community colleges and universities, places of worship, clubs or any other non-public safety organization. Any workplace team that is established should at a minimum have a relationship with a local public safety agency. It is recommended to have a working relationship with any public safety sponsored teams and have their protocols synchronized.

A Workplace CERT program can support and enhance existing capabilities within the workplace. Additionally, the team can participate in efforts to increase the preparedness and resilience of the workplace and community. Workplace CERT programs are designed to operate in any type of workplace environment. Refer to the Workplace CERT Starter Guide developed by FEMA as you plan and build a CERT in your workplace.

An annex on how to utilize the CERT Basic Training materials tailoring them for college or university campus has also been developed by FEMA. The Campus CERT annex provides information that can be used by instructors to target the material for campus-based teams.

How a CERT team or the CERT Basic Training can be utilized in these various applications is beyond the scope of this document.

Sponsor:

These teams are created / sponsored by a non-public safety agency. Goals of the team and what activities the team engages in is under the control of the jurisdiction having authority over the team, in this case the sponsoring group that created the team. Note: CERT Basic Training program may also be utilized to augment the emergency planning of any organization without the establishment of a CERT team. An example of this is to teach the organizations response team the Incident Command System (ICS) and enhance the interface of the internal team with responding public safety agencies.

Sample documents are available from the CERT Support Committee that may assist with the development of team management documents.

Additionally, best practices are also available from the Committee. A best practice is a document that describes a method or technique that has been generally accepted as superior to any alternatives. Note these have been created for public safety-based teams and may require adaptation to fit your workplace team needs.

The jurisdiction having authority over the CERT team has the final authority over any resulting documents based upon any samples or best practices offered by the Committee.

Training:

Recommended training is highly dependent on the workplace teams' function. Much of the training requirements will come from outside requirements such as OSHA for business / industry-based safety teams.

Refer to the document Continuing Education Guide for additional information on recommended training.

Deployment:

Workplace teams' activities are normally at the sponsoring organizations' location(s) only. However, there are some team missions / applications that may have them be active at other locations.

As some groups may use CERT Basic Training to augment disaster response activities, they may be deployed to various incidents. Additionally, some groups may support various special events or organization activities.

If the team may be deployed outside of the sponsoring organizations' location(s), it is recommended that mutual aid agreements be in place before the deployment.

Some teams may also have a standing working relationship with a local public safety agency. How and for what activities the team is deployed for should be preplanned and applicable agreements in place beforehand between the sponsoring organization and the public safety agencies the team will be supporting.

Scope of Activities:

The scope of the team's activities is under the control of the jurisdiction having authority over the team. It is the responsibility to ensure that the members of the team have received the proper training and any required certifications needed for the activities the team is involved in.

Additionally, team members who may have additional training and / or certifications that exceed the scope of activities of the team should not perform those functions when operating as a team member.

Neighborhood Team:

These are composed of a core group of CERT trained individuals and neighborhood volunteers. The groups provide an on-going source of disaster preparedness information and support during disasters in their neighborhood.

Sponsor:

These teams may be informal or are created / sponsored by the neighborhood. Goals of the team and what activities the team engages in is under the control of the jurisdiction having authority in this case neighborhood group that created the team.

Sample documents are available from the CERT Support Committee that may assist with the development of team management documents.

Additionally, best practices are also available from the Committee. A best practice is a document that describes a method or technique that has been generally accepted as superior to any alternatives. Note these have been created for public safety-based teams and may require adaptation to fit your workplace team needs.

The jurisdiction having authority over the CERT team has the final authority over any resulting documents based upon any samples or best practices offered by the Committee.

Training:

Recommended training is highly dependent on the neighborhood teams' goals. FEMA's Are You Ready and You Are the Help Until Help Arrives training materials should also be used as part of the team's training. CPR training is also highly recommended. Refer to the Continuing Education Guide for additional information on recommended training.

Deployment:

Neighborhood teams' activities are limited to the neighborhood(s) location only.

Scope of Activities:

The scope of the team's activities is limited to the skills taught in the CERT Basic Training program and any other recognized training the members received.

Individual Preparedness:

The CERT Basic Training curriculum can also be used along with FEMA's Are You Ready training materials to help individuals be better prepared for all types of emergencies.

For local CERT program managers and others who want to provide preparedness training to teens, an annex on how to utilize the CERT Basis Training materials tailoring them for teens has been developed by FEMA.

Sponsor:

Not Applicable.

Training:

Recommended training is highly dependent on the individuals' goals. FEMA's Are You Ready training materials should also be used as part of the training plan. CPR training is also highly recommended. Training beyond this is decided by the individual. Refer to the document Continuing Education Guide for additional information on recommended training.

Deployment:

The individual's activities are limited to caring for themselves and family members only.

Scope of Activities:

The scope of the individual's activities is limited to the skills taught in the CERT Basic Training program and any other recognized training received.

Team Type Comparison Matrix

	Formal Team, Basic	Formal Team, Advanced	Workplace (School / Business / Industry)	Neighborhood	Personal Preparedness
Description	Team started by a public safety sponsor to augment local response capability. Tasks limited the skills covered in the Basic Training program.	Team started by a public safety sponsor to augment local response capability. Tasks include the skills covered in the Basic Training program. Additional training taken to preform specialized functions in support of area needs.	Team started by a school, business, industry or similar to augment internal response capability. CERT training is part of their overall emergency management plans.	Neighbors takes the training as a group for preparedness of the neighborhood / area	Individual takes the training for their own preparedness
Public Safety Sponsor	Yes	Yes	Optional	Optional	No
Minimum Training	CERT Basic Training	CERT Basic Training Specialty Training ➢ FEMA Created ➢ Locally Created	CERT Basic Training	CERT Basic Training	CERT Basic Training
Continuing Education	Yes	Yes, Both basic and specialty training	Recommended	Recommended	Recommended
Formal Organizational Structure	Yes	Yes	Recommended	Recommended	No
Deployable	Yes, inside jurisdiction, maybe outside jurisdiction Team started by a public safety sponsor to augment local response capability. Tasks limited the skills covered in the Basic Training program.	Yes, inside jurisdiction, maybe outside jurisdiction Team started by a public safety sponsor to augment local response capability. Tasks include the skills covered in the Basic Training program. Additional training taken to preform specialized functions in support of area needs.	Maybe If the team has a relationship / agreement in place with a local public safety agency they may be deployable.	No	No