



Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT)

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.

About CERT

Following a major disaster, first responders who provide fire and medical services will not be able to meet the demand for these services. Factors as number of victims, communication failures, and road blockages will prevent people from accessing emergency services they have come to expect at a moment's notice through 911. People will have to rely on each other for help in order to meet their immediate life saving and life sustaining needs.

One also expects that under these kinds of conditions, family members, fellow employees, and neighbors will spontaneously try to help each other. This was the case following the Mexico City earthquake where untrained, spontaneous volunteers saved 800 people. However, 100 people lost their lives while attempting to save others. This is a high price to pay and is preventable through training.

If we can predict that emergency services will not meet immediate needs following a major disaster, especially if there is no warning as in an earthquake, and people will spontaneously volunteer, what can government do to prepare citizens for this eventuality?

First, present citizens the facts about what to expect following a major disaster in terms of immediate services. Second, give the message about their responsibility for mitigation and preparedness. Third, train them in needed life saving skills with emphasis on decision making skills, rescuer safety, and doing the greatest good for the greatest number. Fourth, organize teams so that they are an extension of first responder services offering immediate help to victims until professional services arrive.

Courses

The CERT course is delivered in the community by a team of first responders who have the requisite knowledge and skills to instruct the sessions. It is suggested that the instructors complete a CERT Train-the-Trainer (TTT) conducted by their State Training Office for Emergency Management or the Emergency Management Institute in order to learn the training techniques that are used successfully by the LAFD.

The CERT training for community groups is usually delivered in 2 1/2 hour sessions, one evening a week over a 7 week period. The training consists of the following:



- Session I, **DISASTER PREPAREDNESS**: Addresses hazards to which people are vulnerable in their community. Materials cover actions that participants and their families take before, during, and after a disaster. Since they will want to help their family members and neighbors, this training can help them operate in a safe and appropriate manner. The CERT concept and organization are discussed as well as applicable laws governing volunteers in that jurisdiction.



- Session II, **DISASTER FIRE SUPPRESSION**: Briefly covers fire chemistry, hazardous materials, fire hazards, and fire suppression strategies. However, the thrust of this session is the safe use of fire extinguishers, sizing up the situation, controlling utilities, and extinguishing a small fire.



- Session III, **DISASTER MEDICAL OPERATIONS PART I**: Participants practice diagnosing and treating airway obstruction, bleeding, and shock by using simple triage and rapid treatment techniques.



- Session IV, **DISASTER MEDICAL OPERATIONS, PART II**: Covers evaluating patients by doing a head to toe assessment, establishing a medical treatment area, performing basic first aid, and practicing in a safe and sanitary manner.



- Session V, **LIGHT SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS**: Participants learn about search and rescue planning, size-up, search techniques, rescue techniques, and most important, rescuer safety.



- Session VI, **DISASTER PSYCHOLOGY AND TEAM ORGANIZATION**: Covers signs and symptoms that might be experienced by the disaster victim and worker. It addresses CERT organization and management principles and the need for documentation.



- Session VII, **COURSE REVIEW AND DISASTER SIMULATION**: Participants review their answers to an examination. Finally, they practice the skills that they have learned during the previous six sessions in disaster activity.

CERT is about readiness, people helping people, rescuer safety, and doing the greatest good for the greatest number. CERT is a positive and realistic approach to emergency and disaster situations where citizens will be initially on their own and their actions can make a difference.

Through training, citizens can manage utilities and put out small fires; treat the three killers by opening airways, controlling bleeding, and treating for shock; provide basic medical aid; search for and rescue victims safely; and organize themselves and spontaneous volunteers to be effective.

Source <http://www.citizencorps.gov/cert/>