



Fire Watch

Los Angeles Fire Department Newsletter

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Los Angeles Fire Department
200 North Main Street
Los Angeles, CA. 90012
(213) 978-3845
Fax (213) 978-3815

Visit Our Website
www.lafd.org

Our Mission

“To preserve life and property, promote public safety, foster economic growth through leadership, management and actions, as an all-risk fire and life safety response provider.”

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Direct newsletter inquires to:

Planning Section
LAFD
200 North Main Street, Rm. 1800
Los Angeles, CA. 90012

Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT)

THE BIRTH OF COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:

In February 1985, a group of City of Los Angeles officials traveled to Japan to study its extensive earthquake preparedness plans. The group encountered an extremely

homogenous society that had taken extensive steps to train entire neighborhoods in one of four aspects of alleviating the potential devastation that would follow a major earthquake. These single-function neighborhood teams were trained in fire suppression, light search and rescue operations, first aid, and/or evacuation. It was then that the idea came to mind to train the



community as volunteers to assist our emergency services personnel during large natural disasters.

MEXICO CITY EARTHQUAKE FURTHER REINFORCES NEED FOR SAFE HELP: A City of Los Angeles investigation team was sent to Mexico City following an earthquake that occurred on September 19, 1985. This deadly earthquake registered a magnitude 8.1 on the Richter scale. It also killed more than 10,000 people and injured more than 30,000!





Mexico City had no training program for citizens prior to this disaster; fortunately however, large groups of volunteers organized themselves and performed light search and rescue operations. Although these volunteers were credited with more than 800 successful rescues, more than 100 of these untrained volunteers died during the 15-day rescue operation that followed the earthquake. Historically, the presence of spontaneous rescuers is expected during large disasters. However, the 8:1 ratio of sacrificing one uninjured citizen rescuer for every eight trapped victims freed in Mexico was a disturbing statistic to the City investigators.

Lessons learned in Mexico City strongly indicated that a plan was needed to train and organize spontaneous rescuers to help themselves and others become an adjunct to government response, and to prevent them from becoming victims themselves. Citizen training was needed as an essential component of an overall preparedness, survival, and recovery plan for Los Angeles. While creating this plan, members of the development team compared Japan's community response program and demographics to Los Angeles. It was quickly decided that creating teams of "specialists" would not work with LA's highly mobile population. Instead, the goal was to create "generalists" who would safely handle the variety of simple emergencies that are associated with earthquakes and other natural disasters in the City.

CITY'S FIRST PREPAREDNESS TRAINED PIONEERS GRADUATE: In 1986, the LAFD developed a pilot program to train a group of community leaders in a Los Angeles Police Department Neighborhood Watch Organization. The goal was to prove the concept of developing multi-functional volunteer response teams with the ability to perform basic fire suppression, light search and rescue, and first aid. The LAFD's Fire and Safety Education Unit trained the first team of 30 people in early 1986.



This "generalist" training concept has since proven viable through the various practical drills, demonstrations, and exercises that have involved CERT graduates. However, further expansion of the program at that time was not feasible due to limited City resources. As a result, the program remained undeveloped until October 1987.

WHITTIER NARROWS EARTHQUAKE: On October 1, 1987, the Whittier Narrows earthquake again vividly underscored the threat of an area-wide major disaster and demonstrated the need to expedite the training of civilians to be independent and prepared for earthquakes and other emergencies. Following the

Whittier Narrows earthquake, the City took an aggressive role in protecting its citizens by creating the Disaster Preparedness Division, Disaster Preparedness Unit (DPU) within the LAFD. Their immediate objectives included the following:

- Educate and train the public and government sectors in disaster preparedness.
- Research, evaluate, and disseminate disaster information.
- Develop, train, and maintain a network of Community Emergency Response Teams.

FEMA PARTNERS TO EXPAND THE PROGRAM: In 1993, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) decided to make the CERT concept and program available to communities nationwide. FEMA's Emergency Management Institute, in cooperation with the LAFD, expanded the CERT materials to make them applicable to all natural hazards.

TERRORISM ADDED TO PREPAREDNESS CONCERNS: In 2002, as a result of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack, CERT became one of the core components of President George W. Bush's new Citizen Corps, a unifying structure developed to link a variety of related volunteer activities and resources.

As of January 2004, 50 states, three territories, and six foreign countries are using CERT training programs. It is anticipated that our CERT Program will continue to evolve into a fully integrated Fire Department volunteer force.

HOME OF THE CURRENT CITY CERT PROGRAM: Today, the Disaster Preparedness Unit is located



behind Fire Station 88 in Sherman Oaks.

As part of the Special Operations Section, the Unit is staffed with one Captain I and eight Firefighter III/Instructors and a Secretary.

From this location, the instructors travel to scheduled class locations throughout the City to provide the CERT training courses.

CURRENT CERT PROGRAM OVERVIEW:

The initial (Basic) CERT training offered to citizens is a positive and realistic introduction to emergency and disaster situations. Emphasized throughout the CERT curriculum is that, although CERT graduates may find themselves initially on their own, they can make a significant difference within their affected neighborhoods and communities. History has demonstrated that people will respond to others in need with, or without, appropriate training. The primary goal of CERT training is to help good samaritans aid others effectively and efficiently without placing themselves in unnecessary danger.

CERT training is provided free of charge and shows citizens how to:

- Prepare themselves for disasters
- Manage utilities
- Extinguish small fires
- Perform "Medical Triage"
- Do initial patient assessment
- Search and rescue victims safely

- Organize themselves and other spontaneous volunteers into effective groups

opportunity to attend one-day biannual refresher drills. There they will receive their CERT identification card.



The vest and identification card are used to identify themselves to citizens and officials alike as having volunteered and completed CERT training. The CERT Program can be held anywhere within the City of Los Angeles. Due to insurance issues, classes are only open to citizens 18 years or older. There are no restrictions on ages over 18 or other

- Collect disaster intelligence to support first responder efforts

During initial basic training, CERT members must attend class for 17½ hours. Classes are taught throughout the City all year long. Upon completion of the seven required classes, citizens are given

physical conditions. Information on the CERT Program and the current teaching schedule are available at www.cert-la.com or by contacting DPU at (818) 756-9674.

ADDITIONAL TRAINING OFFERED:

CERT graduates are currently classified into one of three training levels. After completion of the required advanced courses, the CERT members above "basic level" are given "Level Rockers" for their green vest. These rockers indicate that the member has completed additional training. The general concept is that "basic graduates" can assist LAFD members in any non-hazardous situation. More advanced "Level 2" graduates have additional training in dealing with displaced persons and "Level 3" graduates are capable of assisting in casualty care.



their Certificate of Completion, green CERT helmet, and vest. Graduates are then provided the



CERT PROGRAM TRAINING LEVELS:

Level I (Basic)	17.5 Total Training Hours Consisting of: Initial CERT Course (Sessions 1-7)
Level II (Intermediate)	29.5 Total Training Hours Consisting of: 17.5 Hours – Level I Training 3.0 Hours – Introduction to Disaster Services (#3066/Red Cross) 3.0 Hours – Mass Care (#3068-1/Red Cross) 6.0 Hours – Shelter Operations & Shelter Simulation (#3068-12/Red Cross)
Level III (Advanced)	79.5+ Total Training Hours Consisting of: 17.5 Hours – Level I Training 12.0 Hours – Level II Training 50+ Hours – Emergency Response Advanced First Aid (#32600/Red Cross)

CERT graduates have assisted in the past with setting up evacuation shelters used during the Simi Valley Brush Fire, volunteered to assist the Department during the L.A. Marathon, and were also very active following the Northridge earthquake. Other future opportunities to assist members of the LAFD may include:

- Damage assessment during rains/flooding
- Emergency drills
- Community Fire Patrol
- Erecting traffic barriers and staffing “Closed Street” barricades
- Directing traffic at emergency incidents
- Providing station security during elections



ACTIVATING A CERT TEAM: CERT graduates are given the opportunity to volunteer for “call-outs” through their Battalion Coordinator. Graduates who do not volunteer are considered “members at large” and may have little or no contact with the LAFD but may be involved with their community.

Graduates who volunteer for call-out response fall under the control of two entities, the CERT Program Captain and the CERT Battalion and Division Coordinators. The CERT Battalion Coordinators are CERT-trained citizens who have volunteered and have been selected to act as the primary liaison between the CERT volunteers and the Battalion Chiefs. The CERT Division Coordinators are uniformed LAFD members who are also CERT instructors. They are tasked as a liaison between the CERT Battalion Coordinator, the CERT Program Captain and the Battalion Chief. They are

subject matter experts who can answer questions, assist on call-outs, and support the Battalion Chief in the management of the CERT Teams.

Any incident commander can activate their Battalion CERT by contacting the CERT Battalion Coordinator, who then activates the team. The CERT Battalion Coordinator is tasked with contacting the individual CERT team members as directed. Available contact phone numbers for CERT Battalion Coordinators are retained at Battalion Headquarters and also by the Floor Captain at the Operations Control Division. The Department’s vision is to further expand the training of Level III CERT members to include an even more varied curriculum. CERT volunteers continue to be integrated into all LAFD emergency plans and operations.



Special thanks to Captain John E. Ruedy, a 15-year LAFD veteran who is currently the CERT Program Manager assigned to the Disaster Preparedness Unit. Also, special thanks to Firefighter/Lead Paramedic James Harkins, a 26-year LAFD veteran, who provided the research and insight into DPU’s history and operations. He has been involved with the CERT Program since 1987.