

## **Teen SERT Program**

In most parts of America, the concept of a citizen's need to obtain emergency preparedness education is not a priority. The events of September 11, 2001, increased the awareness, but citizens are still asking, "What can I do to prepare?"

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program is designed to target the general population and is most often implemented by community-oriented groups. Research has shown, however, that individuals in the pre-teen and young adult age groups are more receptive to basic citizenship-building initiatives. Creation of an ongoing Teen School Emergency Response Training (SERT) curriculum-based program offers opportunities to extend the education by mentoring others through the school's clubs and organizations, as well as offering opportunities to include the parents and relatives of the Teen SERT students.

An additional benefit Teen SERT offers is the opportunity to track graduates beyond high school. This data could be used to determine if the early introduction to Teen SERT has an effect on an adult citizen's choosing a career in the field of first response, either as a paid or volunteer professional.

With the existing CERT curriculum, the foundation is formed to develop a Teen SERT program as part of the high school course offerings by following the core CERT curriculum. Promotion of Teen SERT offers numerous exposures ranging from hometown parades, to national competitions, and medical standbys for athletic functions.

The additional benefits provide a channel of education to the parents of the students and plant the seed to establish CERT programs in the Teen SERT school's community, if one does not already exist. If one does exist, CERT members may assist in the classroom with curriculum delivery and/or guest speaking.

The core Teen SERT program has three main goals. First, it seeks to provide students with a knowledge base on the effects of natural and human-caused disasters and their emotional, social, and economic impacts. Secondly, it aims to build decision-making and problem-solving skills and strategies to help students make informed decisions regarding readiness, response and recovery and mitigation efforts to reduce loss of life and property. Lastly, an integral part of the Teen SERT program provides students with hands-on training using reality-driven drills and exercises.

The program is instinctive in its approach in that specially trained, primary responders will participate in the classroom lessons. The responders range from Emergency Medical, Search and Rescue, Law Enforcement, Firefighting and Emergency Management. Teen SERT students hear about firsthand accounts of experiences with all-hazards. It is this unique aspect of the program that not only intrigues the students but will also help to foster a positive relationship between the students and public safety agencies and organizations.

The curriculum is not meant to replace those of previously established initiatives. Rather, it incorporates them in their entirety and focuses on increasing knowledge and skill development in seven areas as they relate to disasters: 1) cognitive information, 2) recognizing hazards, 3) planning skills, 4) consequential thinking and risk taking, 5) team-building and communication skills, 6) decision making, 7) individual responsibilities within the community. Some of these lessons will focus on raising awareness in skill areas, while others emphasize their practical application.

The lessons provide factual information about disasters, with an emphasis on recognizing and mitigating hazards, as well as teach basic response and recovery skills through role-playing and other techniques. It is envisioned that the program will help raise national readiness through enhanced community awareness and broadened parental involvement through active participation in selected activities.

Students who complete the intermediate phase of training continue their efforts in community safety. This initiative provides the basic building blocks necessary to establish and maintain a community's response and recovery capabilities, as well as enhance individual community self-sufficiency.

## **How Teen SERT Students Are Trained**

- o Standardized curriculum is offered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. This curriculum may be adjusted to include the local hazards that exist in the individual community. Students are grouped into teams and complete the course as a unit.
- o Each class lasts for a certain number of hours each week and reading assignments are given at the end of each class, with homework assignments that include parents/guardians of the students (example: family plans, emergency kits).
- o Lecture is supported by video, slides, and other audio visual aids. Lecture time gives way to practical, tabletop, and team building exercises wherever possible.
- o As the final test of the course, a disaster simulation is staged at the school to allow students to apply their newly acquired skills in a realistic environment with multiple casualties. The students choose their Incident Commander and the Drama Club plans the scenario and provides the “victims” that are moulaged to add realism.
- o In addition to the local Fire Department, the existence of other response entities offers an avenue for students interested in becoming better trained in a specific area. These areas of study are taught by personnel from the various departments and associated agencies that normally respond to disaster events.

## **Roles the Team Members Will Play**

As a result of the training, Teen SERT students are better prepared to deal with events that might otherwise seem overwhelming. During an emergency located at the school, Teen SERT students would fully support the leadership of faculty in an actual response. As citizens in their communities, the Teen SERT students are trained to:

- o Recognize the potential hazards associated with a particular type of event and take appropriate action;
- o Take steps to get to safety and/or help others to do so in a more organized fashion;
- o Assume a leadership role with those who are not trained to deal with the event;
- o Administer first aid and/or triage casualties;
- o Identify, organize and utilize available resources;
- o Perform needs assessment, document and communicate needs to local authorities;
- o Allow better allocation of emergency resources by "sizing-up" a situation and properly advising emergency responders.
- o Defer to and assist emergency response authorities upon their arrival.

## **How Students Will Keep Their Interest**

It is important that students realize they are an integral part of the school's support base in an actual response in addition to other outreach and leadership opportunities.

- Students and graduates will be asked to periodically attend activities or other public gatherings to staff exhibits, hand out literature, and help in the outreach efforts of the Teen SERT Program.
- Independent Study courses are available online to support additional education at: <http://www.training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/crslist.asp>.

## **Phase 1: Teen SERT Program**

Teen SERT is proposed as an intermediate level training initiative designed for young adults between the ages of 15 and 18. Its primary purpose is establishing follow-on training in the areas of fire safety and basic fire combating techniques, recognizing injuries and providing basic first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, reinforcing fundamentals of safety in the home and community, basic team building skills and working together to prevent and mitigate disasters, emergency communications systems and their use.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the program, a survey will be taken at the beginning of the program to determine the level of understanding of emergency planning and response. At the end of the program, the same survey will be given and comparative measures will be taken and evaluated.

The classroom curriculum is covered in seven chapters (based on the FEMA CERT curriculum):

Chapter 1 -- Disaster Preparedness

Chapter 2 -- Disaster Fire Suppression

Chapter 3 -- Disaster Medical Operations: Part 1

Chapter 4 -- Disaster Medical Operations: Part 2

Chapter 5 -- Light Search and Rescue Operations

Chapter 6 -- Disaster Psychology

Chapter 7 -- Terrorism

Other ideas in development include Acronym Soup, Weather Spotter, and wildland fire mitigation education. These ideas are more activity-based instead of curriculum-based.

### *Uses of graduates:*

Many of the school's clubs and organizations require interaction within the community. Promotion of Teen SERT at home athletic events, parades, and public events will create curiosity in the general public; therefore, offering the opportunity to educate the public and potentially expand the program throughout Colorado and potentially the nation. At minimum, it will provide a model for schools to follow.

The benefits of promoting Teen SERT are not limited to the classroom, as the Teen SERT students plan may also extend the very basic emergency preparedness information to students of the area's elementary and middle schools, as well as other high schools that are interested in establishing a Teen SERT Program.

## **Phase 2: The CERT Jr.**

To promote the “Train-the-Trainer” concept of CERT, students involved with DECA, Student Council, and other leadership clubs and organizations, may develop and implement emergency preparedness educational outreach programs for the area’s middle and elementary schools. These programs could instill leadership experience with the students to share the knowledge with younger students, following the “Big Brother/Sister” mentoring idea. Very basic education could be provided, such as the difference between a Tornado Watch and a Tornado Warning, Family Plan Evacuation and Communication, and other local hazard education. Hands-on activities include developing animated play with the children, acting out scenarios such as: “Grandpa’s Farm: A Tornado is Coming!” “Flash Flood Warning: What Do You Do?” and “Who Do You Call?”

This portion of the three-phased program is designed to establish the basics of understanding disasters, recognizing hazards and reducing their potential effects through correct readiness and mitigation, and is not intended to teach actual response or recovery techniques.

Anticipating the growth of the Teen SERT program, efforts can be made through DECA, Student Council, and other leadership clubs and organizations to develop private sector partnerships. These efforts allow access to the creative and innovative efforts employed throughout the business sector, as well as provide available industry resources for assisting in production of training and marketing materials. Sponsors will benefit from the public relations visibility that is sure to provide increased business development and enhanced marketing opportunities.

General partnership agreements will be established between various private-public partnership programs, as well as other national and international not-for-profit organizations. These partnerships will ensure cohesiveness of multiple efforts that support public safety education and awareness.

## **Phase 3: Continued Education**

In addition to the standard CERT curriculum, the third phase of the overall program could introduce students to the Independent Study Program that is available through the Emergency Management Institute and the National Fire Academy. Additionally, members would become more familiar with established programs such as the National Flood Insurance Program and FEMA Public Assistance Programs. Many of the Independent Study courses are allowed college credit, if prearranged with the educational facility.

## **Resources**

To develop the Teen SERT, start-up costs are realistically the only costs, due to the rotation of the equipment and manuals from one class to another. Thirty sets of safety gear are needed to support the class count and re-supply of medical supplies will come from private sector partnerships. The safety gear will be used throughout the course as a reminder to the students that Teen SERT’s primary focus is on the safety of the students.

**Safety Gear**

Hardhat (30)  
Gloves (30)  
Vests (30)  
Safety goggles (30)

**Cribbing:**

Pry bar, 2x4's

**Curriculum Costs:**

30 student manuals

**Estimated total: \$16,000**

**Medical**

Blankets (12), Fire extinguishers (3), CPR Sally, Splints  
Backboard, bindings and neckguards, Dummies, Bandages  
Rubber gloves, Adhesive Tape, Blood Pressure Cuffs, Stethoscope,  
Triage tags, Masks (CPR), Miscellaneous Moulage

**Teaching Resources:**

Laptop, Projector

**Promotional Resources:**

Video camera, Digital camera

**Promotion and Resource Storage:**

Trailer for storage of response/training resources