

**COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM**  
**INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) concept was developed and implemented by the City of Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) in 1985. They recognized that citizens would very likely be on their own during the early stages of a catastrophic disaster. Accordingly, LAFD decided that some basic training in disaster survival and rescue skills would improve the ability of citizens to survive and to safely help others until responders or other assistance could arrive.

The training model that the LAFD initiated was adopted by other fire departments around the country, including communities where the major threat is hurricanes rather than earthquakes. Building on this development, in 1994 the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) expanded the CERT materials to make them applicable to all hazards and made the program available to communities nationwide. Since that time, thousands of dedicated trainers, organizations, and citizens have embraced the responsibility to learn new skills and become prepared to execute safe and effective emergency response. We salute you.

The National CERT Program and the Individual and Community Preparedness Division in FEMA would like to thank the following people who participated in a focus group to review and update the *CERT Basic Training* material:

Lt. Joe Geleta  
New Jersey State Police

Pam Harris  
Hernando County (FL) Emergency Management

Erin Hausauer  
Stearns County (MN) Emergency Management

Capt. Joel Kasprzak  
Portland (OR) Fire & Rescue

Cynthia L. Kellams  
Arlington County (VA) CERT Program

Janet E. Lindquist  
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**COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM**  
**INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

---

Mayor Dave Nichols  
Mississippi State Citizen Corps Council

Lt. Brad Smith  
Dearborn (MI) Emergency Management

Kimberly H. Spill  
Pompano Beach (FL) Fire Rescue

Firefighter Jarvis Willis  
Los Angeles (CA) Fire Department

We would also like to thank those many individuals from local and State CERT programs who reviewed the draft of the updated *CERT Basic Training* material.

# COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

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### COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS

Following the events of September 11, 2001, Citizen Corps was launched as a grassroots strategy to strengthen community safety and preparedness through increased civic participation. Since then, the importance of preparedness education, training, and involving the whole community has become increasingly recognized as critical to successful community preparedness and resilience.

Citizen Corps is administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, within the Department of Homeland Security, but is implemented locally. Communities across the country have created Citizen Corps Councils as effective partnerships between government and community leaders to focus on the following objectives: engaging the whole community in collaborative community planning and capacity building; integration of community resources; outreach and localized preparedness education and training; emergency communications to all population segments; drills and exercises; and, volunteer programs.

CERT is a critical program in the effort to engage everyone in America in making their communities safer, more prepared, and more resilient when incidents occur.

Community-based preparedness planning allows us all to prepare for and respond to anticipated disruptions and potential hazards following a disaster. As individuals, we can prepare our homes and families to cope during that critical period. Through pre-event planning, neighborhoods and worksites can also work together to help reduce injuries, loss of lives, and property damage. Neighborhood preparedness will enhance the ability of individuals and neighborhoods to reduce their emergency needs and to manage their existing resources until professional assistance becomes available.

Studies of behavior following disasters have shown that groups working together in the disaster period perform more effectively if there has been prior planning and training for disaster response. These studies also show that organized grassroots efforts may be more successful if they are woven into the social and political fabric of the community — neighborhood associations, schools, workplaces, places of worship, and other existing organizations.

Effective response therefore requires comprehensive planning and coordination of all who will be involved — government, volunteer groups, private businesses, schools, and community organizations. With training and information, individuals and community groups can be prepared to serve as a crucial resource capable of performing many of the emergency functions needed in the immediate post-disaster period. The CERT Program is designed to train individuals to be assets to help communities prepare for effective disaster response.

# COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

---

### WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

The damage caused by natural disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, and flooding, or from manmade/technological events such as explosions or hazardous materials accidents can affect all aspects of a community, from government services to private enterprise to civic activities. These events:

- Severely restrict or overwhelm our response resources, communications, transportation, and utilities
- Leave many individuals and neighborhoods cut off from outside support

Damaged roads and disrupted communications systems may restrict the access of emergency response agencies into critically affected areas. Thus, for the initial period immediately following a disaster — often up to 3 days or longer — individuals, households, and neighborhoods may need to rely on their own resources for:

- Food
- Water
- First aid
- Shelter

Individual preparedness, planning, survival skills, and mutual aid within neighborhoods and worksites during this initial period are essential measures in coping with the aftermath of a disaster. What you do today will have a critical impact on the quality of your survival and your ability to help others safely and effectively. By learning about the likely hazards in your community and your community's plans and protocols, understanding hazard-specific protective actions and response skills, assembling important emergency supplies, and mitigating potential hazards in your home, you will be more resilient to any disruptive event. You will be an important asset to your family, neighbors, and other members of your community.

### ABOUT COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM (CERT) BASIC TRAINING

If available, emergency services personnel are the best trained and equipped to handle emergencies. Following a catastrophic disaster, however, you and the community may be on your own for a period of time because of the size of the area affected, lost communications, and unpassable roads.

CERT Basic Training is designed to prepare you to help yourself and to help others in the event of a catastrophic disaster. Because emergency services personnel will not be able to help everyone immediately, you can make a difference by using your CERT training to save lives and protect property.

## COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

---

#### **ABOUT COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM (CERT) BASIC TRAINING (CONTINUED)**

This training covers basic skills that are important to know in a disaster when emergency services are not available. With training and practice, and by working as a team, you will be able to protect yourself and do the greatest good for the greatest number after a disaster.

#### **How CERTs OPERATE**

As each CERT is organized and trained in accordance with standard operating procedures developed by the sponsoring agency, its members select an Incident Commander/Team Leader (IC/TL) and an alternate and identify a meeting location, or staging area, to be used in the event of a disaster.

The staging area is where the fire department and other services will interact with CERTs. Having a centralized contact point makes it possible to communicate damage assessments and allocate volunteer resources more effectively. This is true for all CERTs, 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, CERTs are deployed progressively and as needs dictate. Members are taught to assess their own needs and the needs of those in their immediate environment first.

CERT members who encounter no need in their immediate area then report to their staging area, where they take on assigned roles based on overall area needs. Members who find themselves in a heavily affected location send runners to staging areas to get help from available resources. Ham and other radio links also may be used to increase communication capabilities and coordination.

The CERT Program can provide an effective first-response capability. Acting as individuals first, then later as members of teams, trained CERT volunteers can fan out within their assigned areas, extinguishing small fires, turning off natural gas at damaged homes, performing light search and rescue, and rendering basic medical treatment. CERTs also act as effective “eyes and ears” for uniformed emergency responders. Trained volunteers also offer an important potential workforce to service organizations in non-hazardous functions such as shelter support, crowd control, and evacuation.

## COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

---

#### COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the *Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Basic Training* is to provide the individuals who complete this course with the basic skills that they will need to respond to their community's immediate needs in the aftermath of a disaster, when emergency services are not immediately available. By working together, CERT members can assist in saving lives and protecting property using the basic techniques in this course. The target audience for this course is individuals who desire the skills and knowledge required to prepare for and respond to a disaster.

#### Overall Course Objectives

Upon completing this course, the participants should be able to:

1. Describe the types of hazards that are most likely to affect their homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods.
2. Take steps to prepare themselves and their families for a disaster.
3. Describe the functions of CERTs and their role in immediate response.
4. Identify and reduce potential fire hazards in their homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods.
5. Work as a team to apply basic fire suppression strategies, resources, and safety measures to extinguish a pan fire.
6. Apply techniques for opening airways, controlling excessive bleeding, and treating for shock.
7. Conduct triage under simulated disaster conditions.
8. Perform head-to-toe patient assessments.
9. Select and set up a treatment area.
10. Employ basic treatments for various injuries and apply splints to suspected fractures and sprains.
11. Identify planning and sizeup requirements for potential search and rescue situations.
12. Describe the most common techniques for searching a structure.
13. Work as a team to apply safe techniques for debris removal and victim extrication.
14. Describe ways to protect rescuers during search and rescue operations.
15. Describe the post-disaster emotional environment and the steps that rescuers can take to relieve their own stressors and those of disaster survivors.
16. Describe CERT organization and documentation requirements.

In addition to the overall course objectives listed above, each unit has specific objectives.

# COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

---

### COURSE AGENDA

The agenda for this course is shown below and continued on the following pages. Please note that some adjustments to the agenda may be required to allow discussion of hazards specific to a community and — depending on class size — to allow all participants to take part in the exercise portions of this course.

Unit	Topics
1	<b>Disaster Preparedness</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Introductions and Overview</li><li>▪ Community Preparedness: Roles and Responsibilities</li><li>▪ Hazards and Their Potential Impact</li><li>▪ Impact on the Infrastructure</li><li>▪ Home and Workplace Preparedness</li><li>▪ Reducing the Impact of Hazards Through Mitigation</li><li>▪ CERT Disaster Response</li><li>▪ Protection for Disaster Workers</li><li>▪ Additional Training for CERTs</li><li>▪ Unit Summary</li></ul>
2	<b>Fire Safety and Utility Controls</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Introduction and Unit Overview</li><li>▪ Fire Chemistry</li><li>▪ Fire and Utility Hazards</li><li>▪ CERT Sizeup</li><li>▪ Fire Sizeup Considerations</li><li>▪ Firefighting Resources</li><li>▪ Fire Suppression Safety</li><li>▪ Hazardous Materials</li><li>▪ Exercise: Suppressing Small Fires</li><li>Unit Summary</li></ul>

**COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM**  
**INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

---

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Topics</b>
3	<b>Disaster Medical Operations — Part 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Introduction and Unit Overview</li><li>▪ Treating Life-Threatening Conditions</li><li>▪ Triage</li><li>▪ Unit Summary</li></ul>
4	<b>Disaster Medical Operations — Part 2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Introduction and Unit Overview</li><li>▪ Public Health Considerations</li><li>▪ Functions of Disaster Medical Operations</li><li>▪ Establishing Medical Treatment Areas</li><li>▪ Conducting Head-to-Toe Assessments</li><li>▪ Treating Burns</li><li>▪ Wound Care</li><li>▪ Treating Fractures, Dislocations, Sprains, and Strains</li><li>▪ Nasal Injuries</li><li>▪ Treating Cold-Related Injuries</li><li>▪ Treating Heat-Related Injuries</li><li>▪ Bites and Stings</li><li>▪ Unit Summary</li></ul>
5	<b>Light Search and Rescue Operations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Introduction and Unit Overview</li><li>▪ Safety During Search and Rescue Operations</li><li>▪ Conducting Interior and Exterior Search Operations</li><li>▪ Conducting Rescue Operations</li><li>▪ Unit Summary</li></ul>
6	<b>CERT Organization</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Introduction and Unit Overview</li><li>▪ CERT Organization</li><li>▪ CERT Mobilization</li></ul>

**COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM**  
**INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

---

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Topics</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Documentation</li><li>▪ Activity: ICS Functions</li><li>▪ Activity: Tabletop Exercise</li><li>▪ Unit Summary</li></ul>
7	<b>Disaster Psychology</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Introduction and Unit Overview</li><li>▪ Disaster Trauma</li><li>▪ Team Well-Being</li><li>▪ Working with Survivors' Trauma</li><li>▪ Unit Summary</li></ul>
8	<b>Terrorism and CERT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Introduction and Unit Overview</li><li>▪ What Is Terrorism?</li><li>▪ Terrorist Targets</li><li>▪ Terrorist Weapons</li><li>▪ CBRNE Indicators</li><li>▪ Preparing at Home, Work, and in Your Neighborhood</li><li>▪ CERTs and Terrorist Incidents</li><li>▪ Activity: Applying CERT Principles to a Suspected Terrorist Incident</li><li>▪ Unit Summary</li></ul>
9	<b>Course Review, Final Exam, and Disaster Simulation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Introduction and Unit Overview</li><li>▪ Course Review</li><li>▪ Final Exam</li><li>▪ Disaster Simulation</li><li>▪ Exercise Critique and Summary</li></ul>

**COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM**  
**INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

---

**AFTER CERT BASIC TRAINING**

Upon completion of the *CERT Basic Training* course, you will receive a certificate. Your community may also provide you with additional documents that will identify you as an emergency response team member during disaster response.

You should maintain your CERT safety equipment, such as goggles, gloves, and basic first aid supplies, and have them available for use during a disaster. Training in disaster response should not be a one-time event. Awareness, commitment, and skills must be reinforced through follow-up training and repeated practice to maintain the edge necessary for effective response in the face of a disaster.

To maintain your skill level and continually improve performance, you and your team members should participate in continuing supplemental training when offered in your area. Working through practice disaster scenarios with other teams will provide opportunities not only for extended practice but also for valuable networking with teams in the local area.