

community emergency response teams

The safety and resilience of our neighborhoods depend on preparedness and collective action, especially when facing unexpected crises. Community Emergency Response Teams, or CERT, stand as a vital component of this preparedness, empowering ordinary citizens with the skills and knowledge to help themselves, their families, and their neighbors during emergencies. From natural disasters like earthquakes and hurricanes to man-made events such as power outages or acts of terrorism, CERT members are trained to provide immediate assistance before professional responders arrive. This article delves deep into the world of Community Emergency Response Teams, exploring their purpose, training, how to get involved, and their invaluable role in strengthening community resilience. Understanding what CERT is and how it functions is crucial for anyone interested in disaster preparedness and community service.

Understanding Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT)

Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) are organized groups of citizens trained in basic disaster response skills. The program, originally developed by the Los Angeles City Fire Department in 1985, has since been adopted by numerous communities across the United States and internationally. The core philosophy behind CERT is that individuals can be trained to provide initial assistance to their communities in the event of a disaster, when professional responders are overwhelmed or delayed. This self-sufficiency and neighborly support are critical during the "golden hours" following a major incident.

CERT training covers a wide range of essential skills, equipping volunteers with the knowledge to manage emergencies effectively until professional help is available. The program emphasizes practical, hands-on learning, ensuring that participants are confident and capable when called upon. The goal is to reduce the impact of disasters through education and training, fostering a more prepared and resilient community for everyone.

The Purpose and Goals of CERT Programs

The primary purpose of Community Emergency Response Teams is to enhance a community's ability to respond to and recover from disasters. This is achieved through several key goals. Firstly, CERT aims to educate and train community members in disaster preparedness and response techniques. This includes understanding potential hazards, creating household disaster plans, and assembling emergency supply kits. Secondly, the program focuses on teaching participants essential skills such as light search and rescue, basic fire suppression, disaster medical operations, and organization and leadership.

Furthermore, CERT seeks to build a network of trained volunteers who can assist their neighbors during emergencies. This network acts as a force multiplier for official emergency services, extending their reach and capacity. By empowering citizens to help themselves and others, CERT programs contribute to a more robust and coordinated response effort. The ultimate goal is to improve the overall survivability and reduce the impact of disasters on individuals and the community as a whole, fostering a stronger

sense of collective safety and preparedness.

The History and Evolution of CERT

The genesis of Community Emergency Response Teams can be traced back to the aftermath of the 1984 Los Angeles riots and the 1987 Whittier Narrows earthquake. These events highlighted the strain placed on emergency services and the need for citizens to be prepared to assist themselves and their communities. The Los Angeles City Fire Department, recognizing this need, developed the CERT program to equip civilians with the skills necessary to respond to disasters until professional help arrives.

The program's success led to its national adoption and expansion. In 1993, the Emergency Management Institute (EMI), part of FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency), further developed the CERT curriculum, standardizing training materials and making them available to communities nationwide. This nationalization facilitated the widespread implementation of CERT programs, allowing more individuals and communities to benefit from this vital preparedness initiative. Over the years, the CERT curriculum has been updated to reflect evolving disaster risks and response strategies, ensuring its continued relevance and effectiveness in promoting community resilience.

CERT Training: Skills and Curriculum

The cornerstone of any Community Emergency Response Team is its comprehensive training program. CERT volunteers undergo rigorous instruction designed to equip them with practical skills for various emergency scenarios. This training is not about replacing professional responders but about enabling individuals to provide immediate, life-saving assistance and manage emergencies effectively until those professionals can take over. The curriculum is designed to be accessible and applicable to everyday citizens, regardless of their prior experience with emergency services.

The skills learned in CERT training are broad and cover critical areas of disaster response. These skills empower volunteers to make a significant difference in their communities during times of crisis. The training emphasizes hands-on practice, simulations, and teamwork, ensuring that participants are well-prepared to act when needed. The curriculum is continuously reviewed and updated to address current and emerging threats.

Core CERT Training Modules

The standard CERT training program typically consists of several core modules, each focusing on a distinct area of disaster response. These modules are designed to provide a foundational understanding and practical application of essential skills. Participation in these modules provides a well-rounded preparedness skillset.

- **Disaster Preparedness:** This module covers identifying potential hazards in one's community, creating family disaster plans, and assembling emergency supply kits. It stresses the importance of individual and family preparedness as the first line of defense.

- **Fire Safety and Suppression:** Volunteers learn about common fire hazards, basic fire prevention techniques, and the use of fire extinguishers. They are trained in safely extinguishing small fires before they spread.
- **Light Search and Rescue:** This module teaches techniques for safely locating and extricating victims from collapsed structures or debris. It emphasizes "do no harm" principles and proper lifting and moving techniques.
- **Disaster Medical Operations:** Participants are trained in basic first aid, including wound care, treatment for shock, and managing basic medical emergencies such as burns, sprains, and fractures. They also learn about the "START" (Simple Triage and Rapid Treatment) method for categorizing casualties.
- **Psychological Aspects of Disasters:** This training addresses the emotional and mental impact of disasters on individuals and communities. Volunteers learn how to provide comfort and support to victims and manage their own stress.
- **Team Organization and Communications:** Participants learn about the principles of team organization, leadership, and effective communication during chaotic situations. This includes the use of radios and other communication devices.
- **Hazardous Materials Awareness:** This module introduces volunteers to the identification of hazardous materials and the basic steps to take in case of an incident involving them.
- **Disaster Simulation:** The training often culminates in a comprehensive simulation exercise where participants apply their learned skills in a realistic disaster scenario.

Specialized CERT Training and Advanced Skills

While the core CERT curriculum provides a strong foundation, many programs offer specialized training and opportunities for volunteers to develop more advanced skills. These advanced areas allow CERT members to contribute in more specific or demanding ways to their community's emergency response efforts. Such specialized training ensures a more capable and versatile volunteer force.

- **Advanced Medical Care:** Some CERT programs may offer further training in areas like advanced first aid, CPR/AED certification, or even basic medical assessments.
- **CERT Incident Command System (ICS) Training:** Volunteers can receive training in the Incident Command System, a standardized, on-scene all-hazard incident management concept. This allows them to integrate more effectively with professional incident management teams.
- **Damage Assessment:** Advanced training can include skills for assessing structural damage to buildings and infrastructure following a disaster, helping to prioritize recovery efforts.

- **Shelter Operations:** Volunteers might be trained in the setup and management of temporary emergency shelters, providing essential services to displaced individuals.
- **Animal Rescue and Care:** In communities where animal welfare is a significant concern during disasters, CERT programs may offer specialized training in animal handling and rescue.
- **Communication Skills:** Beyond basic communication, volunteers might receive training in using ham radios, establishing communication networks, or using specific emergency communication platforms.

Getting Involved with Community Emergency Response Teams

Becoming a member of a Community Emergency Response Team is a rewarding way to contribute to your community's safety and resilience. The process generally involves a commitment to training and active participation in team activities. The accessibility of CERT programs makes it feasible for a wide range of individuals to get involved, from students to retirees.

The initial step is usually to identify if a CERT program exists in your local area and how to join. Many local government agencies, including fire departments, emergency management offices, or local volunteer centers, are responsible for organizing and managing CERT programs. Reaching out to these entities is often the most direct way to learn about opportunities and requirements.

Finding and Joining a Local CERT Program

The first step in joining a Community Emergency Response Team is to determine if a program exists in your immediate community or nearby. Many municipalities, counties, or even specific neighborhoods have established CERT chapters. A good starting point for finding a program is by contacting your local:

- Fire Department
- Emergency Management Agency/Office
- City or County Government Website
- Local Volunteer Coordination Center

Once a program is identified, the next step typically involves an application process, which may include a background check, especially if volunteers will be working closely with vulnerable populations or sensitive information. Following the application, prospective members will usually need to complete the core CERT training. This training is often offered free of charge or at a nominal cost to cover materials. The commitment typically

involves attending scheduled training sessions, which can vary in frequency and duration depending on the program. Active participation in drills, exercises, and community events is also often encouraged.

Roles and Responsibilities of CERT Volunteers

Community Emergency Response Team volunteers play a crucial role in bolstering community preparedness and response capabilities. Their responsibilities are varied and depend on the specific needs of the community and the nature of the emergency. While the core training provides a broad skillset, individual volunteers often find specific areas where they can best contribute based on their interests and aptitudes.

- **Immediate Response:** During a disaster, CERT members are trained to provide immediate assistance to their immediate families and neighbors. This includes basic first aid, managing minor injuries, and ensuring the safety of their immediate surroundings.
- **Search and Rescue:** CERT volunteers can conduct light search and rescue operations in affected areas to locate individuals who may be trapped or injured.
- **Damage Assessment:** They can assist in evaluating the extent of damage to homes and infrastructure, providing valuable information to official response agencies.
- **Fire Suppression:** Trained volunteers can safely extinguish small fires, preventing them from spreading and causing further damage.
- **Medical Support:** Providing basic medical care, such as dressing wounds, treating burns, and managing shock, is a key responsibility.
- **Communication:** CERT members can help establish communication networks, relaying important information between residents and official responders.
- **Shelter Support:** They may assist in setting up and managing temporary shelters for displaced individuals and families.
- **Information Dissemination:** CERT volunteers can help distribute important public safety information and instructions from official sources to the community.
- **Logistical Support:** Providing assistance with tasks such as distributing supplies, managing traffic flow, or supporting evacuation efforts are also common roles.

It's important for CERT volunteers to understand that they operate under the guidance of and in support of professional emergency services, not as a replacement for them. Their role is to bridge the gap until professional help arrives and to provide essential support services during the recovery phase.

The Impact and Benefits of Community Emergency Response Teams

Community Emergency Response Teams have a profound and far-reaching impact on the safety and resilience of the communities they serve. By equipping ordinary citizens with essential disaster response skills, CERT programs create a more prepared and capable populace, significantly enhancing a community's ability to withstand and recover from emergencies. The benefits extend beyond immediate crisis response, fostering a stronger sense of community and individual empowerment.

The effectiveness of CERT is measured not only in the direct aid provided during emergencies but also in the preventative measures and preparedness activities undertaken by its members. Their presence strengthens the overall fabric of community safety, creating a ripple effect of preparedness and mutual support. The tangible and intangible benefits underscore the value of investing in and supporting these vital volunteer groups.

Strengthening Community Resilience and Preparedness

One of the most significant impacts of Community Emergency Response Teams is their role in strengthening overall community resilience. Resilience, in this context, refers to a community's ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from adverse events. CERT members are trained to be self-sufficient and to assist their neighbors, thereby reducing the strain on official emergency services during a crisis.

By increasing the number of trained individuals within a community, CERT effectively creates a decentralized network of first responders. This network is crucial when professional services may be overwhelmed or unable to reach all affected areas quickly. Furthermore, CERT training promotes individual and family preparedness, encouraging citizens to develop their own disaster plans and emergency kits. This proactive approach significantly reduces the number of people who might require immediate assistance, allowing professional responders to focus on the most critical situations. The presence of an active CERT also serves as a visible reminder of the importance of preparedness, encouraging broader community engagement in safety initiatives.

Supporting Professional Emergency Responders

Community Emergency Response Teams are designed to supplement, not replace, the efforts of professional emergency responders such as firefighters, police officers, and paramedics. During major disasters, these professionals often face overwhelming demands. CERT volunteers can significantly alleviate this burden by handling tasks that do not require specialized professional skills.

For instance, CERT members can provide basic first aid and comfort to the injured, assist in minor search and rescue operations, help manage crowds, or support the establishment and operation of temporary shelters. By taking on these roles, CERT volunteers allow professional responders to concentrate on more complex and life-threatening situations, such as major rescue operations, firefighting, and advanced medical treatment. This coordinated effort between trained volunteers and professional services ensures a more

efficient and effective overall response to a disaster, ultimately saving more lives and minimizing damage.

Personal Growth and Civic Engagement

Beyond their role in emergency response, participating in a Community Emergency Response Team offers substantial benefits for personal growth and civic engagement. The training itself builds confidence and develops practical life skills that can be valuable in everyday situations, not just during emergencies. Learning to assess situations, make quick decisions, and work effectively in a team environment fosters leadership qualities and problem-solving abilities.

Moreover, CERT provides a tangible avenue for individuals to contribute meaningfully to their communities. It fosters a sense of belonging and shared purpose, connecting volunteers with like-minded individuals who are dedicated to public service. This active involvement in civic life can lead to increased community awareness, a stronger sense of empowerment, and a greater appreciation for the efforts of emergency services. The skills and experiences gained through CERT can also translate into increased employability and professional development for volunteers.

Conclusion: Building Stronger, Safer Communities Together

Community Emergency Response Teams represent a powerful model for citizen engagement in disaster preparedness and response. By providing accessible training in essential skills, CERT empowers individuals to become valuable assets in their own neighborhoods during times of crisis. The program's success lies in its ability to create a network of prepared citizens who can support themselves, their families, and their communities until professional help arrives, and beyond. Investing in CERT is an investment in the collective safety and resilience of our communities, fostering a culture of preparedness and mutual aid that benefits everyone.

The principles of CERT – preparedness, training, and community action – are fundamental to building robust and self-sufficient communities capable of weathering any storm. Whether it's responding to natural disasters or managing the aftermath of man-made incidents, the skills and dedication of CERT volunteers are invaluable. Encouraging participation and supporting local CERT programs is a vital step towards creating a safer and more prepared future for all.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) and what is their primary purpose?

CERT programs train volunteers to prepare for and respond to disasters in their communities. Their primary purpose is to provide immediate assistance to victims, their

families, and their neighborhoods during emergencies when first responders are overwhelmed or delayed, and to help reduce the burden on these professional services.

What specific skills do CERT volunteers typically learn during their training?

CERT training covers a range of essential disaster preparedness and response skills. These often include disaster preparedness, fire suppression, basic search and rescue, medical operations (treating injuries and illnesses), light search and rescue, basic first aid, emergency medical operations, organizing a CERT response, disaster psychology, and terrorism awareness.

How do CERT members support professional first responders during a disaster?

CERT members act as a force multiplier for professional first responders. They can provide initial assistance, conduct damage assessments, assist with triage, manage shelters, provide basic first aid, and help with communication and public information until professional help arrives. They are trained to do what they can safely and not to put themselves in undue danger.

Is CERT training free, and how can someone find a CERT program in their area?

In many areas, CERT training is provided free of charge by local governments, fire departments, or emergency management agencies. To find a program, individuals can check their local government's emergency management website, their city or county website, or contact their local fire or police department. FEMA also provides resources for finding CERT programs.

What are the current trends or areas of focus for CERT programs?

Current trends in CERT programs often involve incorporating more specialized training, such as active shooter response preparedness, cyber security awareness for community resilience, mental health first aid for disaster victims, and enhancing technological integration for communication and information sharing during events. Emphasis is also placed on community outreach and recruitment.

How do CERT teams differ from professional emergency services like fire departments or paramedics?

CERT members are volunteers who provide immediate assistance during the initial phase of a disaster, bridging the gap until professional responders arrive. They are trained to provide basic skills, not to perform the advanced medical procedures or complex rescue operations that trained professionals are equipped to handle. CERT is about community self-help and support.

What is the role of CERT in promoting community preparedness and resilience?

CERT plays a vital role in community preparedness by educating residents on how to be self-sufficient during the first 72 hours of a disaster. They also empower individuals to help their neighbors and contribute to the overall resilience of the community by fostering a culture of preparedness and organized response.

Are there any age restrictions for joining a CERT program?

While specific age requirements can vary by local program, generally, individuals must be at least 18 years old to participate fully in CERT training and activities. Some programs may have provisions for younger participants to join with parental consent or in specific roles, but this is less common.

What are some of the challenges facing CERT programs today, and how are they being addressed?

Challenges include volunteer recruitment and retention, securing adequate funding and resources, maintaining consistent training standards, and ensuring CERT teams are properly integrated into official emergency response plans. Addressing these involves stronger community outreach, partnerships with local organizations, leveraging grants, and continuous training and skill refreshers.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), with descriptions:

1.

CERT: Your Guide to Community Preparedness

This foundational book delves into the core principles and practices of Community Emergency Response Teams. It offers a comprehensive overview of CERT training modules, covering disaster preparedness, fire safety, light search and rescue, and medical operations. Readers will learn how to effectively organize and deploy CERT resources within their neighborhoods during emergencies. The guide emphasizes teamwork, leadership, and communication skills essential for successful community resilience.

2.

Disaster Ready: Building Resilient Communities with CERT

Focusing on the broader concept of community resilience, this book explores how CERT

programs contribute to a more prepared and adaptable populace. It highlights successful CERT initiatives and case studies from diverse communities, illustrating the tangible impact of citizen preparedness. The text provides practical advice for establishing and sustaining a robust CERT program, from volunteer recruitment to ongoing training and community outreach. It's an invaluable resource for anyone looking to foster local preparedness and mutual aid.

3.

CERT Skills: Essential Techniques for Citizen Responders

This practical manual serves as a hands-on resource for CERT volunteers, detailing essential skills and techniques. It provides step-by-step instructions for critical tasks such as basic first aid, CPR, debris removal, and tending to minor injuries. The book includes diagrams and illustrations to aid understanding, making complex procedures accessible to laypeople. It's a go-to reference for CERT members to refresh their knowledge and hone their practical abilities.

4.

Leading Your CERT: Strategies for Effective Volunteer Management

Designed for CERT leaders and coordinators, this book offers insights into the art of managing and motivating volunteers. It covers essential leadership principles, effective communication strategies, and methods for fostering a strong sense of camaraderie and shared purpose within a CERT unit. The guide also addresses challenges such as volunteer retention, conflict resolution, and coordinating with local emergency services. It's a vital read for anyone taking on a leadership role in their local CERT.

5.

CERT Operations: Coordinating Response in Local Disasters

This book focuses on the operational aspects of CERT deployment during actual emergency events. It outlines best practices for incident command structures at the local level, resource management, and effective communication channels during chaotic situations. The text explores how CERT teams can integrate seamlessly with official first responders, filling critical gaps in immediate post-disaster support. It provides a realistic look at how CERTs function in real-world disaster scenarios.

6.

The CERT Toolkit: Tools and Equipment for Citizen Preparedness

An essential guide for any CERT member, this book details the necessary tools and equipment for effective disaster response. It covers everything from personal protective

equipment (PPE) and basic medical supplies to communication devices and specialized rescue gear. The book also offers advice on sourcing, maintaining, and safely utilizing these items. It's a practical resource to ensure CERT teams are well-equipped to handle a variety of emergency situations.

7.

CERT in Action: Inspiring Stories of Community Service

This inspiring collection showcases the dedication and impact of CERT volunteers through real-life stories and testimonials. It highlights how ordinary citizens have stepped up to make a significant difference in their communities during crises. The book celebrates the spirit of volunteerism and the power of collective action in building stronger, more resilient neighborhoods. It serves as a powerful motivator and a testament to the value of CERT programs.

8.

CERT Training Essentials: A Comprehensive Curriculum Companion

This book acts as a comprehensive companion to official CERT training programs, elaborating on key concepts and providing supplementary information. It offers deeper dives into topics such as hazard identification, risk assessment, and the psychological impact of disasters. The text is ideal for individuals preparing for CERT certification or those seeking to deepen their understanding of preparedness principles. It reinforces the learning process and provides a solid knowledge base.

9.

CERT and Public Health: Protecting Your Community's Well-being

Focusing on the intersection of community preparedness and public health, this book examines the role of CERTs in addressing health-related emergencies. It covers topics such as pandemic response, mass casualty incident support, and providing basic care in the absence of professional medical services. The guide emphasizes hygiene, sanitation, and the mental health aspects of disaster recovery for both responders and the community. It's a critical resource for understanding CERT's contribution to overall community health and safety.

[Community Emergency Response Teams](#)

Community Emergency Response Teams

Related Articles

- [community legal services](#)
- [communist manifesto socioeconomic journey](#)
- [communist manifesto social justice outcomes and their evaluation in the us](#)

[Back to Home](#)