

Some Frequently Asked Questions



Q: What is CERT?

A: 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.

Q: How does CERT benefit the community?

A: People who go through CERT training have a better understanding of the potential threats to their home, workplace and community and can take the right steps to lessen the effects of these hazards on themselves, their homes or workplace. If a disaster happens that overwhelms local response capability, CERT members can apply the training learned in the classroom and during exercises to give critical support to their family, loved ones, neighbors or associates in their immediate area until help arrives. When help does arrive, CERTs provide useful information to responders and support their efforts, as directed, at the disaster site. CERT members can also assist with non-emergency projects that improve the safety of the community. CERTs have been used to distribute and/or install smoke alarms, replace smoke alarm batteries in the home of elderly, distribute disaster education material, provide services at special events, such as parades, sporting events, concerts and more.

Q: Why take the CERT training?

A: Local government prepares for everyday emergencies. However, there can be an emergency or disaster that can overwhelm the community's immediate response capability. While adjacent jurisdictions, State and Federal resources can activate to help, there may be a delay for them getting to those who need them. The primary reason for CERT training is to give people the decision-making, organizational, and practical skills to offer immediate assistance to family members, neighbors, and associates while waiting for help. While people will respond to others in need without the training, the goal of the CERT program is to help people do so effectively and efficiently without placing themselves in unnecessary danger.

A success story about CERTs comes from events during the wildfires in Florida. The Edgewater CERT helped emergency management and the fire department personnel by assisting with evacuation; handling donations; preparing food for firefighters; and answering the phone while the professionals were fighting the fire. This is a great example of CERT members and response personnel working together for the benefit of the community.

Q: What is the Cost?

A: Training is provided at no cost to participants through a Citizen Corps grant from the Connecticut Department of Homeland Security.

Q: How do I take CERT training?

A: To become a CERT member, you will have to take the CERT training from a sponsoring agency like an emergency management agency, fire department or police department in the area where you live or work. Contact the local emergency manager where you live or work and ask about the education and training opportunities available to you. Let this person know about your interest in CERT.

Q: What if I want to do more than just the basic training?

A: CERT members can increase their knowledge and capability by attending classes provided by other community agencies on animal care, special needs concerns, donation management, community relations, shelter management, debris removal, utilities control, advanced first aid, Automatic External Defibrillator use, CPR skills, and others. The sponsoring agency should maintain records of this training and call upon CERT members when these additional skills are needed in the community.

CERT member also can use their skills to help the program flourish by volunteering to schedule events, produce a newsletter, perform administrative work, and take leadership positions.

Q: Can someone under age 18 participate?

A: This is a local decision. Someone under 18 should be with a parent or have permission to attend. Some communities have reached out specifically to young people. Winter Springs High School in Florida offers the training to high school students. CERT is a great way to address the community service requirements for high school students and provides students with useful skills. CERT also fits nicely with training given to Boy and Girl Scouts and the Civil Air patrol.

Q: What if I have concerns about my age or physical ability?

A: There are many jobs within a CERT for someone who wants to be involved and help. Following a disaster, CERT members are needed for documentation, comforting others, logistics, etc. Non-disaster related team activities may include keeping databases, developing a website, writing a newsletter, planning activities, helping with special events and organizing exercises and activities.

During CERT classroom training, if one has a concern about doing a skill like lifting, just let the instructor know. You can learn from watching. We would like everyone who wants to go through the training to have an opportunity to participate and learn the skills. CERT educates participants about local hazards and trains them in skills that are useful during disaster and life's everyday emergencies.