

Module 1: Introduction to CERT

Lesson 1: CERT Overview

Self-Study Guide

Lesson Overview

Overview	This lesson provides an overview of the CERT role in disaster preparedness and response. It also covers what you will learn in other lessons about CERT organization and activities.
Lesson Objectives	After completing this lesson, you should be able to identify ways in which CERTs contribute to disaster preparedness and response.
Estimated Time	20 minutes
Contents	<p>This lesson includes the following sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Lesson Overview▪ CERT Concept▪ CERT Roles▪ Module Overview▪ Lesson Summary

Getting Ready for CERT Training

The purpose of this course is to help you prepare for classroom CERT training that may be available in your community.

This course will:

- Provide foundation concepts for key CERT operations.
- Explain principles and guidelines for CERT activities.
- Preview the procedures that you will learn in the classroom.

Course Structure

To receive credit for the course, you must complete all lessons and pass the posttest. The last lesson provides instructions on how to complete the posttest.

Each lesson will take you between 20 to 30 minutes to complete. It is important to allow enough time to complete each lesson in its entirety. The lesson overview states the approximate length of the lesson.

Completing the Knowledge Reviews

Knowledge Reviews provide activities for you to review the content covered in the course.

CAUTION!

While completing this self-study guide, remember that you have not been fully trained to perform CERT activities. Proper training requires personalized instruction and supervised practice.

Do NOT try to use the procedures covered in this course until you have completed classroom training!

Preparing for Classroom Training

The first step in preparing for classroom training is to complete this course with thought and care:

- Read every page carefully. Think about the content and how it may apply to you. Make note of any questions that you may want to ask during classroom training.
- Complete all items on the knowledge reviews.
- When you have completed all of the lessons and the course review, take the final test.

Other Ways to Prepare

Below are some additional ways that you can prepare for classroom training.

- Do some research on your community's disaster history:
 - What types of disasters have occurred in the past?
 - What other hazards have been identified?

You can find out a lot just by checking newspaper archives, searching on the Internet, visiting the town library, and talking to residents.

- Check your community website and the FEMA website (www.fema.gov). Find out what kinds of preparedness information is provided for individuals, families, businesses, and public institutions.
- Contact your local emergency manager to determine the education and training opportunities available to you in your area.

Lesson Overview

Agencies like Fire, Police, Public Works, and Emergency Medical work to provide immediate response in disasters. However, during disasters, these organizations may not be able to meet immediate needs because of demands and disrupted communication and transportation systems. It is possible that following a disaster, CERTs may respond to immediate needs in their neighborhoods or workplaces.

Why Are CERTs Such an Important Part of the Response Team?

Disasters—whether natural or manmade—have several things in common.

- First, they are relatively unexpected. While we have more warning for a hurricane than, for example, a tornado, all disasters are unplanned.
- Second, emergency personnel may be overwhelmed. Emergency service departments are not staffed for catastrophic events, and damage to the infrastructure may restrict their operations further.
- Third, lives, health, and the environment are endangered. Disaster victims may be killed or injured, public health issues may arise, and damage to the infrastructure, land, vegetation, and wildlife may occur.

CERT teams have an important role to play in extending the response capability in their neighborhoods and workplaces.

This lesson will provide an overview of the CERT concept and the ways that CERTs contribute to emergency preparedness and response.

CERT Concept

CERTs are formed by members of a neighborhood or workplace who want to better prepare for the hazards that threaten their communities.

The use of CERTs has grown from the original concept of involving community members in earthquake response operations to a program with merit for all communities and all disasters.

CERT allows community members to become active participants in learning about their hazards and preparing for them. And after training, CERT members augment emergency services capabilities, when called upon, by learning skills that they can apply following a disaster.

CERTs: Community Resource

Besides disaster-related activities, CERTs have the potential to become a known and trusted volunteer resource that can actively support the response community in many ways, such as:

- Helping with community safety projects.
- Preparing their neighborhoods or workplaces.

CERT Participation in Recent Disasters and Emergencies

CERT teams have participated in many disaster responses. Below are some examples of contributions that CERTs have made.

Northridge Earthquake (1994)

During the Northridge earthquake, the following instances of the use of CERTs were recorded:

- Search: 203
- Rescue: 17
- Medical treatment: 57
- Patient transport: 4
- Fire suppression: 5
- Utility control: 156

Hurricane Floyd (1999) and Tropical Storm Gordon (2000)

During Hurricane Floyd and Tropical Storm Gordon, CERTs in Alachua County, FL were called upon by the EOC to contact special-needs residents to ensure that they were aware of the approaching storms and to ascertain whether they would use the county's special needs shelters and transportation. The CERTs arranged transportation, as necessary.

Hidden Lake and Lake Louise Fires (2000)

About a dozen CERTs were used during the Hidden Lake and Lake Louise fires to provide food for the firefighters, move supplies, and assist with preparation in the area.

Olathe, KS Tornado Cleanup (2003)

CERT members from the cities of Olathe, Overland Park, Leawood, and Merriam, KS and from Johnson County government assisted first responders after tornadoes devastated the area in May 2003.

Whatcom County, WA

CERT members in Whatcom County were used in the following situations:

- Whatcom Creek gasoline pipeline explosion (Olympic Pipeline)
- Explosion at the Georgia-Pacific Pulp & Paper Mill
- Y2K Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activation
- Sandy Point wind and flood event
- Nisqually earthquake

The CERT members who responded to the Whatcom Creek incident received the American Red Cross Real Heroes award for their contributions. CERT members in the county have received Federal, State, and local recognition for their response efforts.

CERTs Make a Difference

Below CERT members share their thoughts on how they contribute to their communities.

**Kim Sharpe
CERT Member**

“I think that we're a backup to emergency services that are overwhelmed. I also see us in building upon, within the community, of learning, of meeting your neighbors, or people in other parts of your community and becoming more comfortable with them and sharing knowledge and resources. It feels good knowing other people in the community and that they care as much as you do about the community.”

**Sandy Bastille
CERT Member**

“The idea for CERT is to prepare yourself for anything that might happen to you. In other words, if you're able to take care of yourself, and each person is able to take care of themselves, and they're prepared to do so, then overall everybody cooperatively has worked toward the same goal and it lessens the burden on the actual emergency personnel that come into play that need to have more flexibility. We're there for support.”

**Allen Abbott
CERT Member**

“It's a fantastic program. I think it should be taught in every community across the country and if it was, then the response that the professional community has to give would be reduced and even the little day to day emergencies would be minimized for the general public if everybody took it. I'm part of the solution and not adding to the problem, probably most important.”

**Jamie Garvelle
CERT Member**

“I've been a volunteer in a lot of different areas, and this was just one more place to get some knowledge and experience and hopefully be of assistance. It's kind of a mindset. The people who come out and do this have a tendency to be people who care about the community anyway, so you've got that in common from the start.”

John Clark
CERT Member

“CERT's important because it provides hands-on training and an awareness of what's going on in your community. That also gives you resources to call upon yourself in order to take care of your family and it's kind of like an expanding ripple, kind of like dropping a rock in a pond and the ripple out for a CERT person. Our goal is to make sure we are safe and protected. Then we move out to the next level and check our family and from there we move out to our community and make sure our neighborhood is safe and that everyone is taken care of and from there we move out to our actual CERT staging area. So it's a multi-part program and concept that we use to make sure our community and our neighborhoods are safe and protected.”

Sara Trimble
CERT Member

“We had an earthquake here a couple of years ago, and definitely shook everybody up and you realize once again why you're doing this, you know, if something happened, I want to feel like I have something to contribute to help and not feel like I'm stuck, not knowing what to do. CERT certainly gives you a background in what you can do to be helpful and what you shouldn't do to, you know, that might get yourself in trouble.”

Why Do Communities Need CERTs?

Disasters overtax normal response resources. Disasters:

- May put lives and property at risk.
- Prevent quick response because of severely damaged communication, medical, and transportation systems.
- May create more needs than can be immediately met because of widespread damage affecting large numbers of people and multiple geographic areas at once.

Managing the multiple effects of a disaster puts a strain on local and surrounding resources. While outside resources will respond, it will take time.

Infrastructure Damage and Response

Disasters can cause significant damage to the infrastructure, including:

- Transportation.
- Structures.
- Communication systems.
- Utilities, water service, and fuel lines.

Damage to infrastructure may restrict the ability of first-response personnel to identify and respond to those who need their help.

**Possible Effects of
Damage to the
Infrastructure****Transportation**

- Inability to assess damage accurately
- Ambulances prevented from reaching victims
- Police prevented from reaching damaged areas
- Fire departments prevented from reaching fires
- Flow of needed supplies interrupted

Structures

- Damaged hospitals unable to function normally
- Increased risk of injury from falling debris

Communication Systems

- Victims unable to call for help
- Coordination of services hampered

Utilities

- Loss of utilities
- Increased risk of fire resulting from gas or electrical problems
- Inadequate water supply
- Increased risk to public health

Water Service

- Firefighting capabilities restricted
- Medical facilities hampered

Fuel Supplies

- Increased risk of fire or explosion from fuel line ruptures
- Risk of asphyxiation
- Flow of needed supplies interrupted

CERTs Augment Response Resources

When response resources are inadequate for the situation, emergency services must focus on the highest priority needs.

- Police will address incidents having a grave impact on public safety.
- Firefighters will suppress major fires.
- EMS personnel will focus on mass casualty events that they can reach.

Lower priority needs will have to be met in other ways. In these instances, CERTs may become responders in their neighborhoods or workplaces.

Knowledge Review

Instructions: Review each statement and then indicate if it is true or false. When you are finished, turn to the next page to check your answers.

	True	False
CERTs operating in their neighborhoods can extend the capabilities of response organizations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CERT requires volunteers to be extensively trained so that they can take the place of emergency responders.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When response resources are limited, emergency services usually convert to a first-come, first-served basis for deploying personnel.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Damage to the infrastructure often restricts the capabilities of response services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Knowledge Review: Answer Key



Instructions: Compare your answers to those shown below.

	True	False
CERTs operating in their neighborhoods can extend the capabilities of response organizations.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
CERT requires volunteers to be extensively trained so that they can take the place of emergency responders.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
When response resources are limited, emergency services usually convert to a first-come, first-served basis for deploying personnel.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Damage to the infrastructure often restricts the capabilities of response services.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The following statements are TRUE:

- CERTs operating in their neighborhoods can extend the capabilities of response organizations. CERTs have the potential to become known and trusted volunteer resources that can actively support the response community in many ways.
- Damage to the infrastructure often restricts the capabilities of response services. For example, transportation may be impeded by road damage, communications may be disrupted, and interrupted water service may interfere with firefighting.

The remaining statements are FALSE.

- When response resources are limited, emergency services usually convert to a first-come, first-served basis for deploying personnel. When response resources are limited, emergency services focus on high-priority needs, not the order in which incidents occur. High priorities will include major fires, grave public safety issues, and mass-casualty situations.
- CERT requires volunteers to be extensively trained so that they can take the place of emergency responders. CERT trains volunteers to augment, not replace emergency service responders.

The Role of CERTs

Now, let's look at CERT roles. CERT members must keep their own safety in mind as a first priority. Safety is your number one priority. Effective CERT teams are well organized, well trained, and well managed.

After receiving training, you will contribute to your community by mitigating hazards and responding to disasters.

Hazard Mitigation and CERTs

Hazard mitigation is preventive action. It involves:

- Reducing hazards in the home and workplace before a disaster occurs.
- Acting immediately after an event to minimize damage and risk.

Examples of CERT mitigation activities include:

- Safely eliminating unnecessary hazardous materials from your home.
- Ensuring that no electrical outlets are overloaded.

Disaster Response and CERTs

Based on their operating procedures, CERTs may respond in their areas following a disaster. CERT members are trained to provide help to others when professional responders are delayed.

After professional responders arrive, CERTs may assist them with critical support activities.

Disaster Response Training

CERTs receive training about when and how to respond after a disaster. Training includes:

- Locating and turning off utilities (if it is safe to do so).
- Extinguishing small fires safely.
- Treating life-threatening injuries until professional assistance can be obtained.
- Conducting light search and rescue operations.
- Helping survivors cope with disaster trauma.

You'll learn more information about these response activities in later lessons, which will prepare you for the hands-on classroom training.

Other CERT Roles

CERT team members can be a valuable resource in their communities by helping with community events and public safety projects.

Read below from the electronic newsletter, The Connection, for more information about CERTs and how they are used throughout the country.

Portland NETs . . . Bigger Than Disaster Response!

All around the United States, fire departments, emergency management professionals, and some law enforcement agencies are getting on board with Community Emergency Response Team training. In Portland, OR, CERT members (called Neighborhood Emergency Teams (NETs)) staff first aid booths at neighborhood fairs and parades; speak at PTA meetings, neighborhood association meetings, and service clubs; and assist Fire Bureau staff at community safety fairs.

Mitigation Actions by CERTs.

These two mitigation actions were organized and completed by the CERT members of Edgewater, FL. The fire department supplied the blue hydrant markers and glue, and CERTs did the rest. They asked the homeowners' permission to mark their home addresses on the street curb and for a voluntary donation, and received 100% cooperation. Both of these mitigation actions were well received by the residents of Edgewater.

CERT Proves To Be Valuable During the Florida Wildfires.

CERT members in the Edgewater area staffed fire stations to answer incoming phone calls, disseminate public information, handle donations, and prepare meals for line personnel.

Partnership for Preparedness . . . Semper Paratus.

In a day of shrinking budgets and small staffs, it is difficult for any public safety agency to maintain a high level of preparedness. Detection of wildfires in rural areas still relies on a person scaling a 100-foot tower in the heat of the day to watch for smoke. Alachua County CERTs are used to supplement fire tower staff during fire season.

Knowledge Review



Instructions: Review each statement, and then indicate if it is true or false. When you are finished, turn to the next page to check your answers.

	True	False
Reducing potential fire hazards in your home is an example of a hazard mitigation action	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The CERT's role is to promote disaster preparedness; CERT members very rarely become involved in disaster response.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
As a CERT, your number one priority is to ensure the safety of those in need.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Part of your CERT training will include learning how to extinguish small fires and conducting light search and rescue operations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Knowledge Review: Answer Key



Instructions: Compare your answers to the correct ones shown below.

	True	False
Reducing potential fire hazards in your home is an example of a hazard mitigation action	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The CERT's role is to promote disaster preparedness; CERT members very rarely become involved in disaster response.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
As a CERT, your number one priority is to ensure the safety of those in need.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Part of your CERT training will include learning how to extinguish small fires and conducting light search and rescue operations.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The following statements are TRUE:

- Reducing potential fire hazards in your home is an example of a hazard mitigation action.
- Part of your CERT training will include learning how to extinguish small fires and conducting light search and rescue operations.

The remaining statements are FALSE.

- The CERT's role is to promote disaster preparedness; CERT members very rarely become involved in disaster response. CERTs perform many response functions immediately after a disaster until professional responders arrive.
- As a CERT, your number one priority is to ensure the safety of those in need. Your number one priority is your own safety and the safety of your family.

Overview

This course has six modules. The final module consists of a course summary and final exam. You are now completing Lesson 1 of the first module. This section presents an overview of the additional three lessons of this module.

Module Overview: Lesson 2: Family and Workplace Preparedness

In Lesson 2, you will learn more about family and workplace preparedness. This lesson covers:

- Steps that you can take to help identify and minimize hazards in your home or workplace and taking steps to remove or reduce those hazards.
- Plans and preparations that will enable you to respond quickly in the event of a disaster.

**Module Overview:
Lesson 3: CERT
Organization**

In Lesson 3, you'll learn about the CERT organization, including its:

- Command and operations structure.
- Relationship with the Incident Command System (ICS).
- Decisionmaking rules.
- Documentation procedures.

**Module Overview:
Lesson 4: CERT Sizeup**

CERT members use a process called sizeup to assess each situation before taking action. Sizeup is a decisionmaking process that CERTs use to determine what they can do safely and where they can do the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Sizeup information dictates:

- Whether to take action and what actions to take.
- In what order actions should be carried out.

Sizeup before taking action is essential to CERT members' safety.

Staying Connected

Reading the CERT online newsletter, "The Connection," is a good way to connect with CERTs in other communities. The newsletter is intended to support community disaster preparedness efforts through the sharing of information and ideas.

Lesson Summary

In this lesson, you learned that:

- Disasters may overwhelm emergency response resources.
- CERTs can extend the capabilities of response organizations through hazard mitigation and response activities.
- Before a disaster, CERTs focus on emergency preparedness and hazard mitigation.
- After a disaster, CERTs may operate directly or assist responders in activities to save or sustain lives and protect property.

Next Lesson

You have completed this lesson. You are now ready to begin Lesson 2: Family and Workplace Preparedness.