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 until responders or other assistance could arrive. The Whittier Narrows earthquake in 1987 underscored the area-wide threat of a major disaster in California. Further, it confirmed the need for training civilians to meet immediate post-disaster needs.

The training program that the LAFD initiated proved to be so beneficial that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) felt that the concept and the program should be made available to communities nationwide. In 1994, the Emergency Management Institute (EMI), in cooperation with the LAFD, expanded the CERT materials to make them applicable to all hazards.

In 2003, President Bush asked all Americans to volunteer in the service of their country. The Citizen Corps program was created to spearheaded this effort to harness the power of every individual through education, training, and volunteer service to make communities safer, stronger, and better prepared to respond to the threats of terrorism, crime, public health issues, and disasters of all kinds. CERT was selected as one of the primary programs offered to the American public to meet this challenge.

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ABOUT COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM (CERT) TRAINING

If available, emergency services personnel are the best trained and equipped to handle emergencies, and you should use them. However, following a catastrophic disaster, 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 Training is designed to prepare you to help yourself, your family, and your neighbors 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 the training in this manual to save lives and protect property.

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 do the greatest good for the greatest number after a disaster, while protecting yourself from becoming a victim.

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

The damage caused by natural disasters and manmade events such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, and terrorism can affect all elements of society and government. These events:

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

It takes time for emergency response agencies to set up and prepare for an organized response, and damaged roads and disrupted communications systems may restrict their access 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.

COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS

Community-based preparedness planning allows us 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 for disaster response. These studies 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 Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program is designed to help communities prepare for effective disaster response through training and planning.

HOW CERTS OPERATE

As each CERT is organized and trained and in accordance with standard operating procedures developed by the sponsoring agency, its members select a team leader 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.

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 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 CB 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 inlets to damaged homes, performing light search and rescue, and rendering basic medical treatment. Trained volunteers also offer an important potential workforce to service organizations in nonhazardous functions such as shelter support, crowd control, and evacuation.