



# COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

## Participant Handbook



Federal Emergency Management Agency  
Emergency Management Institute  
National Fire Academy

## **Acknowledgments**

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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 emergency needs. As a result, the LAFD created the Disaster Preparedness Division with the purpose of training citizens in the CERT concept. As of 1993, more than 8,000 people and 225 teams had been trained.

The training program LAFD initiated proved to be so beneficial that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) felt the concept and the program should be made available to communities nationwide. The Emergency Management Institute (EMI), in cooperation with the LAFD, has expanded the CERT materials to make them applicable to all hazards. The goal of the training continues to be preparing people to help people. Seeing the value of CERT, FEMA is committed to supporting the training of local CERT teams across the nation. These teams too can assist with saving lives and protecting property in the event of a major disaster.

Those who benefit from the training should thank the LAFD for their vision and initiative in developing CERT, and for their willingness to support FEMA's effort to share this program with communities across the nation.

Further appreciation is given to the City of Oakland Fire Department, the City of San Francisco Fire Department, and the City of Colorado Springs Fire Department for their assistance in preparing the training materials. Technical review performed by Jim O'Brien, Certified Emergency Manager, Clark County Fire Department, Las Vegas, Nevada, and Battalion Chief Chris Hunter, Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department, Fairfax County, Virginia.



### **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. You will want to help. 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.



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### *Introduction*

#### *When Disaster Strikes*

The damage caused by natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, and flooding affects all elements of society and government. Catastrophic events:

- Severely restrict and 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 effort, 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 72 hours or longer—individuals, households, and neighborhoods may need to rely on their own resources for:

- Food
- Water
- First aid
- Shelter

Individual preparedness, planning, and survival skills and mutual aid within neighborhoods and worksites during this initial period are essential measures in coping in the aftermath of a disaster.



### *Community Preparedness*

Community-based preparedness planning allows us to prepare for and respond to the 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 organized 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 preplanning.

### *How CERT Teams Operate*

As each CERT team is formed, its members select a team leader and an alternate and identify an emergency meeting location, or *staging area*, to be used in the event of an emergency. Teams are encouraged to go into action even during relatively moderate emergencies—regardless of actual need—in order to gain practice mobilizing and assessing damage.

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 first assess their own needs and those in their immediate environment.

### *How CERT Teams Operate (Continued)*

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 particular area, extinguishing small fires, turning off natural gas inlets to damaged homes, performing light search and rescue, and rendering basic first aid. Trained volunteers also offer an important potential work-force to service organizations in nonhazardous functions such as shelter support, crowd control, and evacuation.

### *The CERT Training Program*

In the next 7 sessions, you will be trained in such basic self-help and mutual-aid emergency functions as:

- Emergency preparedness
- Fire suppression
- Utility control
- Disaster medical operations
- Light search and rescue
- Team organization

Classes are taught by trained emergency personnel, including firefighters and emergency medical services personnel. The program consists of 17½ hours of training and emphasizes hands-on practice.

## Introduction

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### *The CERT Training Program (Continued)*

CERT training is divided into 7 sessions covering the following topics:

<i>SESSION</i>	<i>TOPICS COVERED</i>
<i>1. Disaster Preparedness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduction to disasters</li><li>• Impact on infrastructure</li><li>• Building structures and nonstructural items</li><li>• Role of CERTs in disaster response</li></ul>
<i>2. Disaster Fire Suppression</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identifying and reducing potential fire hazards</li><li>• Basic fire suppression strategy</li><li>• Firefighting resources</li><li>• Firefighting techniques</li></ul>
<i>3. Disaster Medical Operations?Part 1</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Treatment strategies for life-threatening conditions, including:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Airway obstruction</li><li>- Bleeding</li><li>- Shock</li></ul></li><li>• Principles of triage</li></ul>
<i>4. Disaster Medical Operations?Part 2</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Medical operations conducted within treatment areas to which victims are sent from triage, including:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Head-to-toe patient assessment</li><li>- Treatments for various injuries</li><li>- Public health considerations</li></ul></li></ul>
<i>5. Light Search And Rescue Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Search and rescue priorities and resources</li><li>• Techniques for situation size-up and search</li><li>• Lifting, cribbing, and victim removal</li><li>• Rescuer safety, including recognizing:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Rescuer limitations</li><li>- Construction-related hazards</li></ul></li></ul>
<i>6. Disaster Psychology And Team Organization</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The post-disaster emotional environment</li><li>• CERT organization</li><li>• CERT decision making and documentation</li></ul>
<i>7. Course Review And Disaster Simulation</i>	<i>Exercise: Disaster Simulation</i>

### *The CERT Training Program (Continued)*

Upon completion of the course, you will receive a certificate and identification that will identify you as an emergency response team member during disaster response. You should purchase additional safety equipment, such as goggles, gloves, and basic first aid supplies and have them available for use during emergencies. (If you are a member of a business or industry training group, your employer may supply these items for you.)

Training in disaster response should not be a one-time event. Awareness, commitment, and skills must be reinforced through followup training and repeated practice in order to maintain the edge necessary for effective response in the face of an emergency. In order 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 for valuable networking with teams in the local area.

