

# COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM GUIDEBOOK



Vermont CERT Program  
Department of Public Safety  
103 South Main Street  
Waterbury, VT 05676

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Vermont Department of Public Safety and the Vermont Citizen Corps program has developed this guidance document in an effort to assist local Citizen Corps Councils, Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC), and local CERT Program Directors in continuing development and expanding their existing CERT programs.

Team structures will vary depending on location. This document is not developed with the idea that "local control" be usurped. It is developed as a tool for those continuing to develop their programs.

## **CERT MISSION STATEMENT**

To educate citizens to be better prepared to take care of themselves, family friends and neighbors in the event of a disaster of any type until trained emergency responders can arrive. To establish Community Emergency Response Teams as emergency management resources, volunteer pools to help during an emergency, and to perform projects that improve a community's preparedness.

## **OVERVIEW**

A Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) is formed by the local Citizen Corps Council that is supported through the local LEPC. To better prepare their communities for the hazards that threaten their communities and the state: "Neighbor Helping Neighbor".

The CERT course will benefit any citizen who takes it. They will be better prepared to react to and cope with the aftermath of a disaster and provide self help until first responders can assist. Additionally, if a community wants to supplement its response capability after a disaster, civilians can be recruited and trained as neighborhood, county, business and government teams that can also assist.

The CERT program continues to expand nationwide. CERT is a part of the USA Freedom Corps an initiative developed by President Bush as a result of the events of September 11, 2001. The CERT program was initiated in the State of Vermont in December of 2002. The program continues to grow nationally and in the state of Vermont.

## **STARTING A COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM**

Steps to start a CERT:

- ◇ Identify the program goals CERT will meet and the resources available to conduct the program in your area
- ◇ Gain approval from the LEPC to create a CERT to meet the needs of the community
- ◇ Identify and recruit potential participants
- ◇ Prepare By-Laws
- ◇ Identify CERT instructors
- ◇ Conduct CERT training sessions
- ◇ Develop teams; conduct refresher training through monthly meetings

## **FUNDING AND STRUCTURE OF CERT PROGRAMS IN VT**

Congress continues to provide funds through the Citizen Corps program to States and Territories. Grants from these funds are currently available to local communities to start and maintain CERT programs. As described below, funds are funneled through the 13 VT LEPC's.

As with any federal program long term funding may not always be available. CERT programs should explore ways within their LEPC's to ensure long term viability.

Team structure will vary depending on a number of different factors such as location of team membership, sponsors of teams etc. Several teams divided their trained CERT

volunteers into sub teams around their county along with having several members on a Communication team to best take advantage of the team membership in the community.

## **CERT TRAINING and MEETINGS**

Each CERT program director works with their team and the Citizen Corps Chairperson to develop training and meeting dates.

### **TRAINING**

Training is offered in each area at least twice a year if not more often. Training dates can be located on the local CERT web site or the state training web site.

Trainers are qualified trainers who have completed the CERT program and have completed or will complete within one year of training the State Train the Trainer program. A complete list of all available trainers in the state is provided to all CERT leadership. There are also first responders or others who have the requisite skills to present certain segments of the CERT course.

The full course for community members can be delivered in a variety of formats. As long as the basic course material is covered, how the recommended 20-25 hours is offered is a local choice.

If the time line offered in one CERT program does not work for the participant, they can work with other CERT programs to complete their training. The participant works with their local CERT program director and trainer to arrange the best possible schedule of training within their local program or in neighboring programs.

The training consists of the following:

- ✓ **DISASTER PREPAREDNESS:** Addresses hazards to which people are vulnerable in their community. This unit covers actions that participants and their families take before, during and after a disaster.

- ✓ **DISASTER FIRE SUPPRESSION:** Briefly covers fire chemistry, hazardous materials, fire hazards, and fire suppression strategies. However, the thrust of this session is the safe use of fire extinguishers, sizing up the situation, controlling utilities, and extinguishing a small fire.
- ✓ **DISASTER MEDICAL:** this unit focuses on basic first aid and CPR skills.
- ✓ **LIGHT SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS:** Participants learn about search and rescue planning, size-up, search techniques, rescue techniques, and most important, rescuer safety.
- ✓ **CERT TEAM ORGANIZATION:** This unit addresses the aspects of the CERT organization and management principles and need for documentation. It will also discuss local and state policy and procedures.
- ✓ **DISASTER PSYCHOLOGY:** Participants will discuss the signs and symptoms that might be experienced by the disaster victim and worker. Participants will be given strategies on for working in a disaster setting.
- ✓ **COURSE REVIEW AND DISASTER SIMULATION:** Participants review the course goals and discuss how this training will support their preparedness and their community preparedness. Participants will then participate in a final simulated response exercise using their skills learned.

During each session participants are provided with safety equipments and disaster supplies which will be used during the session. Once training is complete the participants are invited to become a member of the local CERT.

CERT trained graduates receives recognition for completing their training. Those who choose to become a member of the local CERT, after a 6 months grace period as an active member, will be assigned equipment that will be used for response. If there is a response before the grace period is up the CERT will have equipment to loan the new member. Once a member of the team they will then receive a photo ID from the state to use during a response.

Keep in mind CERT volunteers **do not**; suppress large fires, enter structures that they consider heavily damaged and dangerous, perform hazardous materials cleanup or respond to incidents involving radiological, chemical, or biological agents, perform medical, fire, or search and rescue operations beyond their level of training, activate or deploy unless called for by proper authority, or perform law enforcement functions.

### **MEETINGS / MAINTAINING INVOLVEMENT**

Once training has been completed participants will choose to be a member of the local CERT or use their skills to prepare their families and themselves for an event that may affect them.

Those who become a member of the CERT will attend monthly (or as designated by their local team guidelines) meetings. These meetings will be used as refresher training and add-on training in a variety of subject areas. This will allow for development of CERT team members in various areas of expertise.

CERT's will also be a part of community education that will include First Responder education and CERT value to the community. It will also include sponsoring or participating in events that will support community education in Preparedness.

### **BEYOND DISASTER RESPONSE**

#### **Roles and Responsibilities of CERT volunteers**

Initially, CERT programs were developed to assist communities in taking care of themselves in the aftermath of a major disaster when first responders are overwhelmed or unable to respond because of communications or transportation difficulties - "Neighbor Helping Neighbor".

As the CERT concept has taken hold across the country, however CERTs have become much more than originally envisioned. CERTs have proven themselves to be an active and vital part of their communities' **preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation**

**capability.** Each team works with their local committees and response agencies to determine what activates they will work on. For example, CERTs have been used to:

- ⇒ Distribute and or install smoke alarms and batteries to the elderly and disabled.
- ⇒ Assist with evacuations, searches and traffic control.
- ⇒ Promote community awareness of potential hazards and preparedness measures.
- ⇒ Supplement staffing at special events, such as parades and field days.
- ⇒ Act as victims in training exercises.

## **ACTIVATION AND DEPLOYMENT OF CERT**

Each CERT will develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to include protocols and activation contact information. Once approved by the local Citizen Corps Council the documents will be sent to VEM and to the State Program Coordinator.

The response role of the CERT is the responsibility of local first responder requests and state requests. The final approval for response, that will also activate the Liability Coverage, will come through calling the VEM Duty Officer at 1-800-347-0488.

For non emergencies CERT response to drills and other non-emergency activities VEM should be notified 24 hours before the event. CERT trained volunteers operating alone are considered "Good Samaritans" and are covered under the Volunteer Protection Act. A CERT volunteer acting on their own does not have any authority beyond serving as a "Good Samaritan".

**When deployed by proper authority CERT's can compliment and enhance fires-response capability in neighborhoods and workplaces.**

CERTs are not intended to replace a community's response capability, but rather, to serve as an important supplement to it. CERT's must keep their own safety in mind as their first priority. CERT's must know their capabilities and the limitations of their training and equipment and work within those limitations.