

Arlington citizen corps Council



Arlington County (VA) Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

With the events of September 11, 2001 still fresh in their minds – and the Pentagon in their backyard -- Arlington County (VA) launched its Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) in September 2002. Since that time, 150 residents have completed their basic training, along with over 40 businesspeople who work in the county but reside elsewhere. Approximately 125 new CERT members are expected to be added each year.

The Arlington County CERT was activated for the first time in the wake of Hurricane Isabel. For four days after the storm, over half of the county's CERT members distributed ice to citizens and marked downed power lines.

Although initial training is provided by members of the Arlington County Fire Department (ACFD), the CERT program within Arlington is primarily neighborhood based. There are currently CERT members residing in over half of the county's 65 civic associations/neighborhoods and there are five well-established neighborhood teams with membership ranging from 13 to 34. All teams meet either monthly or bi-monthly. During these meetings, teams cover topics important to the members and their own neighborhoods. While one team may be covering the operation of two-way radios, another may be practicing splinting and bandaging, while still another identifies neighborhood sources for after-hours supplies and equipment.

As a means of further increasing the value of the CERT to the county and its first responders, continuing and advanced education opportunities – including incident command structure and traffic direction courses – will be provided by the ACFD and the Arlington County Police Department. In addition, through a partnership with the local chapter of the American Red Cross, over 170 CERT members will receive CPR/AED/first aid training by year-end 2004. Many CERT members also volunteer as victims at the mock disaster/final exam for each new class as a means of refreshing skills.

Arlington County CERT members receive regular updates via e-mail regarding CERT news, new members, supply purchasing opportunities, upcoming training, and other items of interest to CERT members.

The Arlington County CERT is supported by funding from the Office of Emergency Management, the Fire Department, FEMA/VDEM grants, and CERT members. A Fire Captain is assigned as the coordinator and classes are taught by Fire Department personnel including most newly promoted Captains. Classes are provided by the County; personal equipment is provided by CERT members. Two community volunteers provide extensive support for the program. One volunteer conducts team orientation as part of the class instruction, writes a bi-weekly email newsletter and articles on special events, and provides support for team coordinators. A volunteer developed the neighborhood team areas and clusters, coordinates the registration for classes, and supports team formation and recruitment.