

## 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.

### Key Points:

- Disasters are unexpected, overwhelming, and dangerous.
  - CERT teams operating in their areas can extend the capabilities of response organizations to minimize damage to life and property.
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## CERT Concept

Community Emergency Response Teams (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.

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## 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.
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## 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

Damage to . . .	Possible Effects
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Inability to assess damage accurately</li><li>▪ Ambulances prevented from reaching victims</li><li>▪ Police prevented from reaching damaged areas</li><li>▪ Fire departments prevented from getting to fires</li><li>▪ Flow of needed supplies is interrupted</li></ul>
Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Damaged hospitals unable to function normally</li><li>▪ Increased risk of injury from falling debris</li></ul>
Communication Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Victims unable to call for help</li><li>▪ Coordination of services is hampered</li></ul>
Utilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Loss of utilities</li><li>▪ Increased risk of fire resulting from gas or electrical problems</li><li>▪ Inadequate water supply</li><li>▪ Increased risk to public health</li></ul>
Water Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Firefighting capabilities restricted</li><li>▪ Medical facilities hampered</li></ul>
Fuel Supplies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Increased risk of fire or explosion from fuel line rupture</li><li>▪ Risk of asphyxiation</li><li>▪ Flow of needed supplies interrupted</li></ul>

### **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.

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### **The Role of CERTs**

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.

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### **Hazard Mitigation**

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.
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### **Disaster Response**

CERTs also respond in the period immediately following a disaster. CERT members are trained to perform many immediate response functions when professional responders are delayed.

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

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### **Disaster Response Activities**

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.
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### **CERT Participation in Recent Disasters and Emergencies**

CERT teams have participated in many disaster responses. Below are some examples.

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

During Hurricane Floyd and Tropical Storm Gordon, CERTs in Alachua County, Florida were called 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.

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#### **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.

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#### **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.

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### **Whatcom County, Washington**

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.

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### **Other CERT Roles**

CERT teams fill other roles besides hazard mitigation and emergency response.

- **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, Oregon, 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. 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 the fire season.
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### **Lesson Summary**

- 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.
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