

Knowing Ahead Can Help Us Prepare

Introduction and Overview Community Preparedness

Following the events of September 11, 2001, Citizen Corps was launched as a grassroots strategy to strengthen community safety and preparedness through increased civic participation. Since then, the importance of preparedness education, training, and involving the whole community has become increasingly recognized as critical to successful community preparedness and resilience. Citizen Corps is administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, within the Department of Homeland Security, but is implemented locally.

Communities across the country have created Citizen Corps Councils as effective partnerships between government and community leaders to focus on the following objectives: engaging the whole community in collaborative community planning and capacity building; integration of community resources; outreach and localized preparedness education and training; emergency communications to all population segments; drills and exercises; and, volunteer programs. CERT is a critical program in the effort to engage everyone in America in making their communities safer, more prepared, and more resilient when incidents occur. Community-based preparedness planning allows us all 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 and training for disaster response. These studies also 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 CERT Program is designed to train individuals to be assets to help communities prepare for effective disaster response.

When Disaster Strikes

The damage caused by natural disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, and flooding, or from manmade/technological events such as explosions or hazardous materials accidents can affect all aspects of a community, from government services to private enterprise to civic activities. These events:

- Severely restrict or overwhelm our response resources, communications, transportation, and utilities
- Leave many individuals and neighborhoods cut off from outside support. Damaged roads and disrupted communications systems may restrict the access of emergency response agencies 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, and 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. What you do today will have a critical impact on the quality of your survival and your ability to help others safely and effectively.

By learning about the likely hazards in your community and your community's plans and protocols, understanding hazard-specific protective actions and response skills, assembling important emergency supplies, and mitigating potential hazards in your home, you will be more resilient to any disruptive event. You will be an important asset to your family, neighbors, and other members of your community.

About Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Basic Training

If available, emergency services personnel are the best trained and equipped to handle emergencies. Following a catastrophic disaster, however, 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 Basic Training is designed to prepare you to help yourself and to help others 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 your CERT training to save lives and protect property. CERT 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 protect yourself and do the greatest good for the greatest number after a disaster.

How CERTs Operate

Each CERT member is organized and trained in accordance with standard operating procedures developed by the sponsoring agency. In an actual disaster, CERTs are deployed progressively and as needs dictate. Members are taught to assess their own needs and the needs of those in their immediate environment first. CERT members who encounter no need in their immediate area then report to a staging area, where they take on assigned roles based on overall neighborhood or workplace needs. Members who find themselves in a heavily affected location may send runners to staging areas to get help from available resources. Ham and other 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 at damaged homes, performing light search and rescue, and rendering basic medical treatment. CERTs also act as effective “eyes and ears” for uniformed emergency responders. Trained volunteers also offer an important potential workforce to service organizations in non-hazardous functions such as shelter support, crowd control, and evacuation when authorized by its sponsoring agency.

The damage caused by natural disasters and manmade events can be extensive. While emergency services personnel are, the best trained and equipped to handle emergencies, they may not be immediately available in a catastrophic disaster. In such a situation, members of the community may be on their own for several days or longer. They may have to rely on their own resources for food, water, first aid, and shelter, and neighbors or coworkers may have to provide immediate assistance to those who are hurt or need other help.

Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) respond in the period immediately after a disaster when response resources are overwhelmed or delayed.

CERTs:

- Assist first responders when requested in accordance with standard operating procedures developed by the sponsoring agency and by area of training
- Assume many of the same functions as response personnel following a disaster While CERTs are a valuable asset in emergency response, CERTs are not trained to perform all of the functions or respond to the same degree as professional responders. CERTs are a bridge to professional responders until they are able to arrive.

CERT training covers basic skills that are important to know in a disaster when emergency services are not immediately available. By learning how to work as a team, neighbors and coworkers will be able to do the greatest good for the greatest number after a disaster.

Community preparedness is a key priority in lessening the impact of disasters. It is critical that all community members take steps to prepare in advance of an event.

Critical Planning for Community Preparedness

Effective community preparedness through Emergency Management addresses the unique attributes of the community:

- The threat and hazards profile and vulnerabilities of the area

- The existing infrastructure
- Resources and skills within the community
- The population composition of the community

Effective community preparedness also engages the whole community:

- Government leaders and the public sector
- Community leaders from the private and civic sector
- The public

Government

Government has the responsibility to develop, test, and refine emergency operations plans, ensure emergency responders have adequate skills and resources, and provide services to protect and assist its citizens. To meet these challenges, government should involve the community in the planning process; to incorporate community resources in the plans; to provide reliable, actionable information; and to encourage training, practicing, and volunteer programs.

Government emergency service providers include:

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| ▪ Emergency Management | ▪ Emergency Medical Services | ▪ Public Works |
| ▪ Law Enforcement | ▪ Public Health Services | ▪ Human Services |
| ▪ Fire and Rescue | | |

Depending on where you live, there will be an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). All government agencies with a role in disaster response work to organize and coordinate their agencies' activities before an emergency or disaster. The product of their work is the Emergency Operations Plan or "EOP" for that community. The EOP is a document that:

- Assigns responsibility to organizations and individuals for carrying out specific actions at projected times and places in an emergency that exceeds the capability or routine responsibility of any one agency (e.g., the fire department)
- Sets forth lines of authority and organizational relationships and shows how all actions will be coordinated
- Describes how people and property will be protected in emergencies and disasters
- Identifies personnel, equipment, facilities, supplies, and other resources available — within the jurisdiction or by agreement with other jurisdictions — for use during response and recovery operations.

In short, the EOP describes how the community will function in an emergency. There may also be a hazard mitigation plan and/or evacuation plan.

Community Leaders

Community leaders from the private and civic sectors have a responsibility to participate in community preparedness. Their responsibilities include:

- Participating on the local collaborative planning council to provide insights and perspectives reflecting their industry or the constituency they service, for example, people with disabilities, local schools, communities with language or cultural differences, small businesses, the economically disadvantaged, communities of faith
- Identifying and integrating appropriate resources into government plans
- Ensuring facilities, staff, and customers or population served are prepared, trained, and practiced in preparedness

The Public

The public also has a responsibility for preparedness. All members of the community should:

- Learn about community alerts and warnings, evacuation routes, and how to get critical information

- Take training in preparedness, first aid, and response skills
- Practice skills and personal plans through periodic drills in multiple settings
- Network and be able to help others
- Participate in community feedback opportunities
- Report suspicious activity
- Volunteer

Engaging the Whole Community

Citizen Corps is the grassroots movement to strengthen community safety and preparedness through increased engagement of all sectors of the community. Citizen Corps is administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, but implemented locally. The goal of Citizen Corps is to make communities safer, more prepared, and more resilient when incidents occur.

Despite advances in technology, a functioning community is based on complex and interdependent systems driven by human forces. Citizen Corps Councils bring government and community leaders together to ensure emergency plans more effectively reflect the community, including the population composition, the hazard profile, and the infrastructure.

The goals of the Councils are to:

- Tailor activities to engage all sectors of the community
- Identify and build on existing strengths
- Increase collaboration between government and the whole community
- Expand integration of community resources into plans and protocols
- Encourage personal and organizational preparedness through outreach, training, and exercises
- Promote volunteer opportunities for ongoing community safety and surge capacity in disasters

Some communities may have a Citizen Corps Council (CCC) or other entity such as a Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) that acts as a CCC.

Hazards and Their Potential Impact

Disasters can be:

Type of Disaster	Disaster events
Natural	earthquakes, wildfires, floods, extreme heat, hurricanes, landslides, thunderstorms, tornadoes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, winter storms
Technological	hazardous material spill, nuclear power plant accident
Intentional	terrorism using chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, or explosive weapons

Key Elements of Disasters

Regardless of the event, disasters have several key elements in common:

- They are relatively unexpected, with little or no warning or opportunity to prepare.
- Available personnel and emergency services may be overwhelmed initially by demands for their services.
- Lives, health, and the environment are endangered.

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, needs are often greater than professional emergency services personnel can provide. In these instances, CERTs become a vital link in the emergency service chain.

Understanding Local Hazard Vulnerability

Assessing your community's vulnerability to hazards allows the community to prioritize preparedness measures and to target effective actions for the appropriate hazard. To assess your community's vulnerability to hazards, it is useful to:

- Identify the most common disasters that occur

- Identify possible hazards with most severe impact
- Consider recent and/or historical impacts
- Identify susceptible locations in the community for specific hazards: people, buildings, infrastructure
- Consider what to expect for disruption of services and length of restoration

Consider what types of problems you may experience with such things as utilities, transportation, structures, communication systems, community and government systems, and financial services.

Damage to . . .	Possible Effects
Transportation	▪ Inability to assess damage accurately
	▪ Ambulances prevented from reaching survivors
	▪ Police prevented from reaching areas of civil unrest
	▪ Fire departments prevented from getting to fires
	▪ Flow of needed supplies (food, water, etc.) is interrupted
	▪ Roads are closed and/or impassable
Structures	▪ Damaged critical facilities (e.g., hospitals, fire stations, police precincts, airports) unable to function normally
	▪ Increased risk of damage from falling debris
Communication Systems	▪ Survivors unable to call for help
	▪ Coordination of services is hampered
	▪ Families and friends cannot communicate
Utilities	▪ Loss of service
	▪ Increased risk of fire or electrical shock
	▪ Limited access to fuel, e.g., pumps that may not work
	▪ Loss of contact between survivors and service providers
Water Service	▪ Medical facilities hampered
	▪ Inadequate water flow, which results in notice to boil water and hampered firefighting capabilities
	▪ Increased risk to public health
Fuel Supplies	▪ Increased risk of fire or explosion from fuel line rupture
	▪ Risk of asphyxiation
Financial Services	▪ ATM machines do not work
	▪ Credit card systems inoperable

Results of Damage to the Infrastructure

Each instance of damage to the infrastructure may severely restrict the abilities of police, fire, and emergency medical services in that disaster. Because emergency services personnel are likely to have inadequate resources to meet the public's needs, those resources must be applied according to the highest priority need.

- Police will address incidences of grave public safety.
- Firefighters will suppress major fires.
- EMS personnel will handle life-threatening injuries. However, CERTs may also handle life threatening injuries until EMS units become available. Lower priority needs will have to be met in other ways.

Hazards Related to Structure Type

You might not have an opportunity to select the type of structure that they are in when a disaster occurs. It is important to know what type of damage to expect from the main types of structures in your home, at your workplace, and in the community.

Hazards from Home and Office Fixtures

Some of the hazards include:

- Gas line ruptures from water heaters or ranges displaced by shaking, water, or wind
- Damage from falling books, dishes, or other cabinet contents
- Risk of injury or electric shock from displaced appliances and office equipment
- Fire from faulty wiring, overloaded plugs, frayed electrical cords Emphasize the importance of reducing hazards as part of personal preparedness.

There are several relatively simple measures that individuals can take to alleviate many home and workplace hazards.

Home and Workplace Preparedness

Preparing for a Disaster

Many preparedness actions are useful in any type of emergency situation, and some are specific to a particular type of disaster. A critical first step to preparedness is to understand the hazards in their communities and to learn about local alerts and warning systems, evacuation routes, and sheltering plans. It is also important that the CERT members familiarize themselves with hazards in other areas when they are traveling and may experience a type of hazard they are not as familiar with.

Regardless of the type of disaster, important elements of disaster preparedness include:

- Having the skills to evaluate the situation quickly and to take effective action to protect yourself
- Having a family disaster plan and practicing the plan with drills
- Assembling supplies in multiple locations
- Reducing the impact of hazards through mitigation practices
- Getting involved by participating in training and volunteer programs Emphasize to participants that it is also always important to address specific needs for themselves and people they know, including any access or functional needs, considerations for pets and service animals, and transportation.

Protective Actions

Because many disasters occur with little or no warning, individuals need to have the knowledge and skills to take immediate protective actions in the first critical moments after a disaster has occurred, before they have instruction from authorities. While the specific action to take is based on the disaster type, the amount of warning, whether they are inside, outside, or driving, and the amount of training they have, the following list provides a good overview of the protective actions you should be familiar with. These should be their objectives in assessing their post-event environment.

- Assess situation. When something occurs without notice, it is important to take a few seconds to assess the situation to determine their most effective next steps. This includes identifying the type of event and whether air or a building structure has been compromised.
- Decide to stay or change locations. In some instances, you should stay where you are (if you are inside and an event has occurred outside, you may need to stay inside) and in other circumstances you should change location (if you are inside and the event is inside, you may need to evacuate the building). All disasters have unique

attributes, so it is important for you to realize that you may need to evaluate the circumstances to determine the best course of action.

Staying or changing location is a critical early decision in disasters. If you are not in immediate danger, stay where you are and get more information before taking your next steps. Thinking through the likely hazards in the community and where you might be when an event occurs may help you visualize your response. While you may need to make the first, immediate decision to stay inside or go outside, or to shelter in place by sealing a room without authoritative instruction, it is important that you listen to local authorities when that information is provided. If experts tell you to evacuate from your location, LEAVE!

- Seek clean air and protect breathing passages. Regardless of the type of disaster, clean air is a critical need. Actions to protect breathing passages and seek clean air may include covering your mouth with a cloth or mask, vacating the building, or sheltering in place by sealing an internal room while the airborne contaminant dissipates.
- Protect yourself from debris and signal rescuers if trapped. Protecting yourself from falling or precarious debris is a critical protective action. If you become trapped, protect your airway, bang on an object, or blow a whistle. Yelling should be a last resort.
- Remove contaminants. If contaminants have been released into the area or you have made contact with liquid or solid contaminants, it is critical that you remove the contaminants as quickly as possible. Remove contaminated clothing and wash with soap and water starting at the head and working toward the feet.
- Practice good hygiene. Good hygiene is a preventive measure for spreading disease, and it's important to be mindful of hygiene in a post disaster environment. Clean drinking water and sanitation are important protective actions.

Sheltering

There are different types of sheltering, and different types are appropriate for different disasters.

- Shelter in place: sealing a room. Sealing a room is a way to protect yourself from contaminants in the air for a short period of time until the contaminants dissipate. You should identify an internal room in your home, at work, or other locations where they spend a great deal of time. If sheltering-in-place is needed, you will be in this room for only a few hours, but it is important that you be able to seal the room quickly. Storing specific items in the room is helpful. You should have snacks and water; a battery-operated radio, a flashlight, and pre-cut plastic sheeting and duct tape to seal off vents and door and window openings.
- Shelter for extended stay. Sheltering for an extended stay means that you would stay where they are for several days or, in the case of a pandemic, you may be asked to limit your time outside the home for up to 2 weeks. It is important to store emergency supplies for these possibilities.
- Mass care/community shelter. These are congregate care facilities that house many people in one location. These shelters often provide water, food, medicine, and basic sanitary facilities but, if possible, you should take your disaster supplies kit with you so that you will be sure to have the supplies you require.

The answers to these questions may be different depending on the hazard and the participants probably will not be able to plan for every event that could happen. By playing "What if?" with high risk hazards, you will be better prepared for any hazard that might strike.

Developing a Disaster Plan

Knowing immediate protective actions that they may need to take, an emergency plan can mean the difference between life and death in a disaster. For example:

- Where will you meet family members? You should have a location outside the house and another location outside the neighborhood.
- Identify an out-of-state "check-in contact."

- Plan for all possibilities: extended stay, shelter in place, or evacuation.
- How will you escape buildings where you spend time: your home, workplace, school, place of worship?
- What route (and several alternatives) will you use to evacuate? Do you have transportation?

Family safety is the most important factor when disaster strikes. In an effort to make the best decision regarding your family's safety, you should always first consider what is best given the situation. It is also essential that you practice your plan with their family —evacuating the home and contacting all family members using their “check-in contact.” Practicing your plan now will improve their performance when it matters most.

Developing a Disaster Supplies Kit

You can cope best by preparing for disaster before it strikes. One way to prepare is by assembling a Disaster Supply Kit. After disaster strikes, you won't have time to shop or search for supplies. But if you've gathered supplies in advance, you and your family can endure an evacuation or home confinement. There will be a disaster supplies list in your book from CERT training and there are also many resources with lists for a supplies kit for you and your family. You will find some when you answer the question sheet

Remember you will need to have special considerations for those with special needs, children, and pets.

Summary

Everyone in the community has the ability and the responsibility to prepare for disasters.

- Citizen Corps is the grassroots movement to strengthen community safety and preparedness through increased civic participation. CERTs are a key partner with Citizen Corps.
- Government leaders have the responsibility to engage the whole community in the process of community planning and in testing and evaluating those plans.
- Community leaders have the responsibility to ensure their employees and constituent groups are prepared and to participate on coordinating planning councils.
- The public has the responsibility to learn about community hazards and plans, and to prepare, train, practice, and volunteer.
- There are three kinds of disasters: natural, technological, and intentional. Most hazards occur with little or no notice, may cause emergency personnel to be overwhelmed, and are a danger to lives, health, and the environment.

Personal preparedness should be tailored to the hazards in your community, but should include:

- Learning about community alerts, warnings, and plans
- Learning about appropriate protective actions
- Developing household plans and conducting drills to practice
- Assembling disaster supplies in multiple locations
- Reducing hazards in the home
- Encouraging others to prepare and volunteering to help your community

CERTs are among a variety of agencies and personnel who cooperate to provide assistance in the aftermath of a disaster. The keys to CERT effectiveness are in:

- Familiarity with the types of events that are high risk for the area and the types of damage that can occur as a result
- Adequate preparation for each event and its aftermath
- Training in the functional areas to which CERTs are assigned
- Practice through refreshers and simulations

CERTs have proven themselves invaluable in the areas in which they were tested. They can be invaluable in this community as well.