

TO: James L. App, City Manager 
FROM: Ken Johnson, ES Chief
SUBJECT: Community Emergency Preparedness
DATE: March 6, 2007

NEEDS: To consider development of a Community Emergency Response Team program.

- FACTS:**
1. Significant community risks include major fires, flooding, hazardous materials releases, civil disturbances, and earthquakes.
 2. The City does not employ enough safety members to immediately respond to all citizen needs resulting from a major event.
 3. Self-sufficiency skills extend the degree of community response and have the potential to save lives and property, and reduce service demand during critical resource shortages.
 4. Citizens frequently request layperson response training.
 5. Development of a new volunteer program to increase citizen knowledge, skills, and abilities for limited disaster response would aid the community's response to such events.
 6. The development and administration of a successful citizen response training program exceeds current resource capacity.

ANALYSIS &

CONCLUSION: Preparing citizens for the impacts of major emergencies/disasters is beneficial in that it allows them to act independently, to some degree, in caring for themselves and their property; extends the overall emergency response as trained citizens can assist their neighbors; and reduces the general emergency services system demand.

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program is under the Federal government's Citizen Corps umbrella. It is mostly a turn-key solution that has been implemented in cities across the country and has proven to be a highly effective means to organize and utilize citizen volunteers (see attachment A for CERT overview).

Adopting the CERT or similar emergency preparedness program increases the likelihood of success, provided sufficient support resources are dedicated. Program demands beyond current capacity include recruitment, training, regular contact with CERT members, occasional drills, and re-training.

A twenty-hour per week contract position is proposed to initiate the program. Management of the CERT program, general preparedness information dissemination (e.g., safety fair coordination and participation), assistance with Neighborhood Watch programs, and similar functions would be included in the scope of work.

POLICY

REFERENCE: None

FISCAL

IMPACT:

No additional appropriation for program development is requested at this time. The project initiation cost is \$9,500. The Department places a high value on the project and has therefore identified certain purchases that it will forego. PD likewise finds value in the position and has committed to covering one-half of the cost.

Implementation of the program once developed, and continuation of the position, will be proposed in the upcoming budget. It is estimated to cost approximately \$25,000 annually of General Fund resource (not currently budgeted).

OPTIONS:

- a. Authorize development of a Community Emergency Response Team program.
- b. Amend, modify or reject above option.

CERT Overview

CERTs are formed by members of a neighborhood or workplace who want to be better prepared for the hazards that threaten their communities.

Beyond Disaster Response

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 communication or transportation difficulties. 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 and response capability. For example, CERTs have been used to:

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

CERTs are an investment of local government's time and resources. To capitalize on this investment, program sponsors can view CERT members as a volunteer resource that can assist with public safety activities. Such an approach will actively involve members in serving their communities beyond disaster response and add value to the CERT program.

CERT Standards and Protocols

The best source of help in an emergency or disaster is the paid or volunteer professional responder. But, if they are not available to address immediate life-saving needs or to protect property, CERT members can help. CERTs are not intended to replace a community's response capability, but rather, to serve as an important supplement to it.

The agency sponsoring the CERT program is creating a volunteer resource that is part of the community's operational capability following a disaster. That agency should develop training standards for CERT personnel and protocols for their activation and use. CERT members must keep their safety in mind as their first priority. CERT volunteers must know their capabilities and the limitations of their training and equipment and work within those limitations.



CERTs do NOT:

- Suppress large fires.
- Enter structures that they consider heavily damaged and dangerous (e.g., leaning or moved from foundation).
- 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 in their procedures.

CERTs are considered "Good Samaritans" and covered under the Volunteer Protection Act. CERT volunteers do not have any authority beyond serving as "Good Samaritan" when helping others.

When deployed appropriately, however, CERTs can complement and enhance first-response capability in neighborhoods and workplaces by ensuring the safety of themselves and their families working outward to the neighborhood or office and beyond until first responders arrive. CERTs can then assist first-response personnel as directed.

<https://www.citizencorps.gov/cert/start-0-1.shtm>