

## ***HISTORY OF THE CERT BASIC TRAINING***

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program is a nationally supported, locally implemented initiative that teaches people how to better prepare themselves for hazards that may affect their communities. CERT trains them in basic disaster response skills such as team organization, disaster medical operations, fire safety, and light search and rescue. Local CERT programs train and organize teams of volunteers to assist their families, neighbors, co-workers, and other community members during emergencies when professional responders may not be immediately available to provide assistance. Before, during, and after disasters, CERT volunteer teams perform basic response activities, including checking in on neighbors, distributing information to the public, supporting emergency operations centers, and helping to manage traffic and crowds. The ability for CERT volunteers to perform these activities frees up professional responders to focus their efforts on more complex, essential, and critical tasks. CERT volunteers also support their communities by organizing, promoting, and participating in emergency preparedness events, activities, and projects.

The Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) developed the CERT program after examining the civilian response to disasters in Mexico and Japan in 1985. The LAFD recognized that citizens are likely to be on their own during the early stages of disaster. Under these circumstances, family members, co-workers, and neighbors will often spontaneously come to the aid of each other. While untrained volunteers can be very effective in aiding others, their lack of training puts them at risk for injury or death. For example, during the response to the 1985 Mexico City earthquake that claimed more than 10,000 lives, untrained volunteers saved 700 lives, but unfortunately, 100 volunteers died in the process.

In response, the LAFD decided to develop and offer disaster response training to Los Angeles residents so that during and after future disasters volunteers would be able to assist in a safe, responsible, and effective manner. The LAFD piloted the first CERT training in 1986. In turn, other fire departments around the country, including communities where the major threat is hurricanes rather than earthquakes, adopted the LAFD's training model. Building on this development, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) expanded the CERT materials in 1994 to make them applicable to all hazards and made the program available to communities nationwide. Since that time, thousands of dedicated trainers, organizations, and citizens have embraced the responsibility to learn new skills and become prepared to execute safe and effective emergency response capabilities.

The National CERT Program Office would like to thank the regional, state, and local partners and subject matter experts who contributed to the 2019 CERT Basic Training update.

## ***A MODEL FOR COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS***

The CERT program is critical in the effort to engage everyone in the United States 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 communities 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 trains individuals to be assets to help communities prepare for effective disaster response.