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## The Arizona Division of Emergency Management's Use of Community Emergency Response Teams in State Exercises

### SUMMARY

Arizona Division of Emergency Management (ADEM) exercise planners incorporated Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) into their 2005 Statewide Eastern Region Exercise. This exercise helped establish CERT volunteers as important components in the support of emergency responders during a major incident.

### BACKGROUND

The ADEM conducts annual emergency response exercises to test incident preparedness and response measures. Each is a full-scale, no-inspection, no-fault exercise focused on locating and eliminating response problems before an actual emergency. The annual exercise strengthens partnerships among state and local agencies, which ultimately improve responses to all-hazards throughout the state. The ADEM Exercise Office organizes the exercises based on roles and responsibilities outlined in the State Emergency Response and Recovery Plan (SERRP). The Emergency Support Functions (ESFs) within the SERRP outline the role of participating response organizations. Prior to 2005, CERT and Citizen Corps were not invited to participate in the annual statewide exercises because the ESFs had not enumerated a role for them.

In January 2005, Arizona State Citizen Corps Program Manager Embe Kugler encouraged ADEM State Exercise Officer Jan Lindner to include substantive roles for CERT teams in the 2005 exercise. Kugler understood that emergency responders hesitated to trust volunteers because of a lack of familiarity with the CERT program, its training, and capabilities. Some responders worried that their professional positions might be replaced by volunteers. Kugler explained that CERT volunteers have extensive training, have participated in small-scale drills, and can provide a valuable resource to supplement professional responders in an incident. Lindner agreed to include CERT in the 2005 exercise.

In Arizona, Citizen Corps is incorporated within the Department of Emergency Management. The Citizen Corps program manager works beside the ADEM exercise officer.

### GOALS

The ADEM's use of CERT teams in the 2005 Statewide Eastern Regional Exercise demonstrated methods for integrating these volunteer teams into emergency preparedness and response efforts. The exercise gave CERT teams an opportunity to demonstrate their training and competence for assisting emergency response personnel.

## **DESCRIPTION**

The Arizona 2005 Eastern Region Statewide Full Scale Exercise was the first opportunity for Arizona CERT teams to demonstrate their extensive training by participating in a statewide exercise. Two CERT teams performed victim transport assistance, basic first aid, and the evacuation of local businesses. The City of Chandler CERT provided a fifteen-member team and Discover Financial Services (DFS) CERT provided an eleven-member team. Additional CERT volunteers supported the exercise by validating registrations, escorting media, and serving as role players such as victims.

### ***Arizona CERT***

CERT training provides volunteers with rigorous emergency response training that prepares them to aid emergency responders. CERT volunteers are instructed in basic first aid techniques, safety planning, incident command protocol, emergency response logistics, search and rescue, and medical operations. Prior to CERT graduation, volunteers participate in an exercise which tests their emergency response skills.

Arizona CERT teams are locally organized and are represented on a regional Citizen Corps Council. CERT teams in the Phoenix-area participate in a comprehensive annual CERT drill and in other small-scale drills hosted by local emergency responders. Additionally, team leaders encourage CERT members to participate in exercises and drills conducted by other agencies in the area.

### ***Statewide Exercise Planning***

Exercise Officer Lindner began planning the 2005 Arizona Statewide Eastern Region Exercise in February 2005. All government divisions, private entities, and other organizations included in the SERRP were asked to participate. She requested that each county and participating entity provide specific objectives to test and instructed them to develop checklists for their objectives. Furthermore, she asked representatives to participate in planning meetings. Program Manager Kugler and Maricopa County Citizen Corps Coordinator Keith Lansbery participated in all 20 planning meetings to ensure that CERT volunteers and teams had substantive roles in the exercise.

The exercise incorporated entities from the government, the private sector, and volunteer organizations. More than 700 individuals and 70 organizations participated in the exercise, including: American Red Cross, Arizona Department of Agriculture, Arizona Department of Corrections, Casa Grande Regional Medical Center, City of Casa Grande, Pinal County Sheriff's Office, and the State Emergency Operations Center. Exercise Officer Lindner requested the participation of two CERT teams in the exercise and another 100 CERT volunteers to serve as victims and support staff. City of Chandler CERT and DFS CERT each provided one team for the exercise.

### ***Disaster Scenario***

The ADEM Exercise Office designed a disaster scenario focusing on terrorist and chemical threats. Exercise planners arranged for participants to arrive on the scene and assemble the way they would in an actual emergency. At 8:00 a.m. on October 14, 2005, the ADEM initiated a real-time, full-scale emergency exercise. A terrorist stole a truck carrying cyanide pellets, nitric acid and other unknown gases, which led to a high-speed police pursuit. The stolen truck struck an Arizona Department of Corrections inmate road crew and then collided with a tanker truck transporting anhydrous ammonia before coming to rest just outside the Casa Grande RV Park where an animal and craft show was under way. The crash released the poisonous gases into the environment near a group of innocent

bystanders. The scenario called for several bystanders and prison inmates to be killed and dozens more injured while poisonous gas flowed into the air.

### ***CERT Participation***

#### **CERT Team Mobilization**

Emergency responders and CERT teams mobilized shortly after the incident occurred. Exercise Officer Lindner asked the CERT teams to self-deploy since they would do so during an actual incident. The City of Chandler CERT and DFS CERT deployed to the site in their own transportation or vans from their program. Upon arrival, the two CERT team leaders briefed the incident commander (IC) on their teams' emergency response skills and qualifications to provide support to emergency responders. The IC provided the CERT teams with their assignments.

#### **CERT Team Assignments**

The IC assigned the City of Chandler CERT and DFS CERT to simulate assisting the Pinal County Sheriff's Office in evacuating local businesses and apartment buildings in the direction opposite the chemical fumes. Chandler CERT simulated business evacuation and DFS CERT simulated an apartment building evacuation. Upon arrival at the sites, the teams informed building tenants of the situation and helped them evacuate to safe locations. After completing their missions, the CERT team leaders briefed the IC and offered to perform additional assignments.



CERT Team Members assist victim before decontamination

Chandler CERT's second assignment focused on transporting victims. In this scenario, victims, exposed to poisonous gas needed to be decontaminated before receiving treatment in the hospital. CERT team members worked under the direction of fire department personnel to assist in transporting patients from the decontamination area to the hospital. After patients were decontaminated, Chandler CERT members put them on stretchers and carried them to the treatment site. Participation of the CERT teams allowed the participating hospital to leverage its trained medical staff on treatment and diagnostic activities, while using CERT to conduct non-medical activities such as victim transportation.

For DFS CERT's second assignment, the team assisted the fire department with decontamination measures. The team was responsible for assisting fire department personnel with decontaminating animals from the show, special needs assistance animals, and wheel chairs. Participation of the CERT team allowed the fire department to complete the decontamination quickly and move on to other tasks.

#### ***Assessing CERT Participation***

The CERT teams' prompt arrival and timely completion of assigned tasks garnered the approval of the participating emergency responders and the state exercise officer. CERT team members, working closely under the supervision of professional emergency responders, exhibited their understanding of the incident command system and ability to follow orders correctly. By completing these tasks, CERT volunteers allowed responders to concentrate on pressing concerns for which they are uniquely trained, such as fighting fires, providing emergency medical care, or securing dangerous areas. According to the Citizen

Corps program manager, “the exercise controllers could not say enough good things about the CERT volunteers.” In addition, the state exercise officer decided that CERT teams will be integrated into future Arizona exercises.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

### **Keys to Success**

#### **Training**

Phoenix-area CERT teams are composed of active volunteers with extensive training. They had the basic first aid training and organizational skills necessary to support emergency responders during this exercise. Furthermore, the skills demonstrated by the Chandler and DFS CERT teams assuaged emergency responders’ concerns regarding the ability of volunteers to provide assistance during an incident.

#### **Early Involvement**

The Citizen Corps program manager advocated for and secured CERT participation in the response exercise prior to the initial planning stages. This early involvement ensured that CERT was fully integrated into the exercise.

“I believe we demonstrated that CERT members are a valuable resource that can be integrated into an emergency or disaster scene.”

**Paul Sullivan, Battalion Chief,  
Community Preparedness Division,  
Chandler Fire Department**

#### **Resources**

Arizona CERT is funded through a Citizen Corps program grant. Arizona is divided into five Homeland Security Regions. The Central Region applied for and received a grant from the Department of Homeland Security to fund all Citizen Corps programs in the region, including CERT. No additional Citizen Corps funding was necessary for CERT participation in this exercise.

#### **Links**

Arizona Department of Corrections

<http://www.azcorrections.gov>

Arizona Department of Emergency Management

<http://www.dem.state.az.us>

Arizona State Citizen Corps Council

<http://www.volunteerarizona.org/stcitcorps/sccc.htm>

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