



National NEWSLETTER

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Wildfire Preparedness in Ramona, Calif.



Ramona CERT members

For residents of southern California, the question is not if a wildfire will occur, but when. Local weather reports note when conditions indicate a high risk for a blaze, while scars etched in the landscape serve as warnings and reminders of fires past. But communities can prepare themselves and educate their residents for when the next wildfire emergency strikes. The CERT members of Ramona are doing just that.

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Fire Safety in Medina, Ohio

Community members in Medina, Ohio, were reminded of the importance of fire safety when an apartment fire took the life of a 7-year-old boy in October. The home did not have a working smoke detector, as was the case in 40% of home fire deaths in 2008, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

The tragedy led the Medina Fire Department to work with the Medina County CERT to distribute smoke detectors, batteries, and fire safety education materials door to door in the community.

“The fire department has always provided smoke detectors and batteries to residents who needed them,” said Fire Chief Robert Painter. “This tragic loss demonstrated that there is still a need for smoke detectors and fire education.”

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<http://www.citizen corps.gov/cert/>



NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS
DIRECTORATE



Ft. Myers, Fla., CERT Uses Computer Program to Assist in Disaster Recovery

One of the most trying aspects of recovering from a hurricane is the mystery and confusion that settles in its wake. Which residents need help? Which roads should be cleared first? Which neighborhood was hit the hardest? These are all common questions asked in the days, and even weeks, after a storm has passed. As the waters recede and debris is cleared, communities must pick up the pieces of their homes and businesses, often going into the cleanup efforts not knowing what to expect.

A new software program called Lee County Windshield Assessment Survey is being used by emergency management in Lee County, Fla., to ease the confusion that follows a major storm. The idea for the program came about as residents waited out Hurricane Charley in 2004 away from their homes. The local CERT program, which now has 100 members, was also started as a result of the storm.

The new software program will allow CERT members and other emergency personnel conducting damage assessments to log into the program, select an area on the county map, and input information collected during visual surveys, inspections, or resident interviews. The program allows users to log

highly specific information about trees, power lines, flooded streets, garbage, blocked streets, and accessible and inaccessible areas.

“ *It will eliminate some of the guesswork in CERT response.* ”
– Al Agathen, CERT leader

“In the event of a major disaster, hurricane or tornado, we would be able to access [the program] through laptops in all fire vehicles,” said Al Agathen, Ft. Myers Beach CERT leader and instructor. The program is intended for use by emergency services personnel only, to ensure the security and integrity of the inputted information. This prevents individuals from tampering with damage and cost estimates for insurance purposes, said Agathen.

The program will be extremely valuable to emergency services coming into a damaged area. CERT members will be trained to input data from their initial assessments into the program, which in turn will alert first responders and other emergency personnel. “When doing a windshield assess-

ment, [if a CERT member] sees something collapsed, they can alert first responders that someone may be trapped,” says Agathen. “They can let national and state people know just how bad the [impact] is.”

Training on the program for Ft. Myers CERT began by inviting members to attend a presentation by Lee County. This initial training included practice inputting data from a mock disaster into laptop computers. Although the new program has not yet been implemented during an actual event, trained CERT members feel more prepared for when disaster does strike.

“It will eliminate some of the guesswork in CERT response,” said Agathen, “and can enhance the lifesaving capabilities of first responders. It will really make a difference.”

For more information, please contact Al Agathen (woodman8989@aol.com).

West Virginia Teen Uses CERT Training to Save Life

It doesn't take a major disaster to use your CERT training. Just ask the Tyler County, W.Va., teen who helped save a man's life in November 2009.

When A.C. Carse and his mother were leaving a New Martinsville grocery

store, the teen noticed an elderly man lying on the ground beside an open car door. The 85-year-old man had fallen and hit his head, and was bleeding badly. As a CERT member for over 2 years, A.C. was well-prepared to assist. He kept the man still,

called 911, helped the man control the bleeding, and stayed with him until the ambulance arrived. “Most people would panic, but I knew what to do,” says A.C.

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Puerto Rico Oil Refinery Fire Leads to CERT Activation



Fire and thick black smoke posed a potential hazard to residents of neighboring towns.

CERT members in Puerto Rico were activated when an explosion at an oil refinery in the Municipality of Cataño triggered major fires.

The explosion at the Caribbean Petroleum Corporation facility happened after midnight on October 23, 2009, and registered 2.8 on the Richter scale. The ensuing fires produced flames 100 feet high and destroyed 21 of 40 fuel tanks containing gasoline, jet fuel, oil, and bunker fuel (used in ships). The widespread flames and smoke created havoc for those battling the blaze and for residents in surrounding areas.

Activation of CERTs from seven municipalities began at 6:00 a.m., with 104 members responding. CERT members supported rescue teams, firefighters, other first responders, and the National Guard as needed. Thankfully, there were no fatalities.

CERT members initially helped with evacuations and distributing food and

water. In the shelters, where 500 of the 1500 evacuated residents were housed, CERT members used their disaster psychology training to offer compassion and support. “They worked very hard in the shelter area and kept people up to date on what was going on and what they would need to bring and do,” said Rachel Murphy Perez, CERT Coordinator. “They are very respected people in Puerto Rico. When we say ‘CERT,’ people in Puerto Rico know help is



CERT members sorting donations for victims

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Fire Safety in Medina, Ohio

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On November 8, 2009, five CERT members partnered with firefighters, employees of a local manufacturing firm, and other agencies to distribute 200 detectors and 300 batteries. CERT members also assisted residents in installing their devices.

“People were really receptive,” said Doug McClure, Medina County CERT leader. “And it was a good touch that detectors were installed on the spot.” For those not at home, members left a packet of information at the door. “One man saw us leaving and called us back to talk,” McClure said.

Though this was the first time the Medina CERT has paired with the fire department, McClure thinks it is just the beginning of their collaborations. “A lot of people are not familiar with the CERT Program,” said McClure, “but the Fire Chief has been happy to work with us.” There are plans to have CERT members more involved with the fire department, beginning with training to assist with traffic control during fires. The county hazmat team is also interested in CERT assistance.

For more information, please contact Doug McClure (dmccclure1@zoominternet.net).

“ This tragic loss demonstrated that there is still a need for smoke detectors and fire education. ”

– Fire Chief Robert Painter

Puerto Rico Oil Refinery Fire Leads to CERT Activation *(Continued from page 3)*



CERT members sorting donations for victims

coming.” Their support in the shelters also included securing the shelter areas to protect the residents.

CERTs also took on the task of managing the incoming donations, diapers, and medicine for babies, and medications for seniors. Perez, who is very proud of the Puerto Rican CERT members, says, “My people know how to respond to a situation because they had really good training.”

The CERT members in Puerto Rico have a tight bond with their community, which was evident in the aftermath of the explosion. After working tirelessly for 72 hours in the shelter areas, CERT members continued

to offer support in the cleanup efforts. CERT members came into the affected communities and offered help, including installing light bulbs in the Puente Blanco residential sector, which suffered property damage.

With over 3,000 people already involved in CERT, Perez adds, “We have a lot of people taking CERT training. They take the classes seriously. When we had to respond to this situation, they knew what to do coming in.”

Wildfire Preparedness in Ramona, Calif. *(Continued from page 1)*

Ramona is located in San Diego County, which was the starting point for two of southern California’s largest fires in recent history. And for the community with a population of 40,000, wildfires have unfortunately become a part of life. “Once one gets started, there’s no stopping it,” said Jolene Dayton, Ramona CERT secretary. “It’s important to be prepared.”

The team conducts public service presentations, staffs booths at community events, and distributes information stressing the importance of preparation. “Every time we do an activity, we have information available on wildfires, because that’s the biggest thing for us,” said Dayton.

In October 2009, ahead of California’s wildfire season, Ramona CERT members partnered with community Allstate insurance agencies to distribute emergency preparedness kits. CERT members set up a display with their command vehicle and trailer at a market

and distributed 2,000 kits. Each kit contained fire safety tips, a first aid kit, a thermal blanket, a safety whistle, an emergency preparedness guide, and other helpful items.

The partnership with Allstate resulted from a \$170,000 grant to the San Diego County Office of Emergency Services (OES) to conduct a public awareness campaign. Ramona had also partnered with State Farm Insurance, going door to door with other community groups to distribute preparedness materials to 4,000 households.

“People were thrilled to have the information. They know they need to do it, but they just haven’t,” said Dayton. Residents should have a plan whether they intend to stay or evacuate. If staying in place, they need plenty of food and water. If evacuating, they should determine ahead of time what stays and what goes. They should also be mentally prepared.

This last hurdle is especially difficult given the area’s history. The Cedar Fire in 2003 burned nearly 300,000 acres and stretched to the beach, jumping a 12-lane freeway in the process. The Witch Creek Fire in 2007 burned almost 200,000 acres and cut off water to Ramona for 9 days. CERT assisted in that fire response, working with shelter operations, traffic control, and radio communications. They also distributed food, water, and materials to residents and emergency services personnel.

Dayton feels CERT has the experience and training necessary to assist the community in the future. And while the effects of the awareness campaign aren’t necessarily “something we’ll visibly see,” said Dayton, she does “think it will make a difference.”

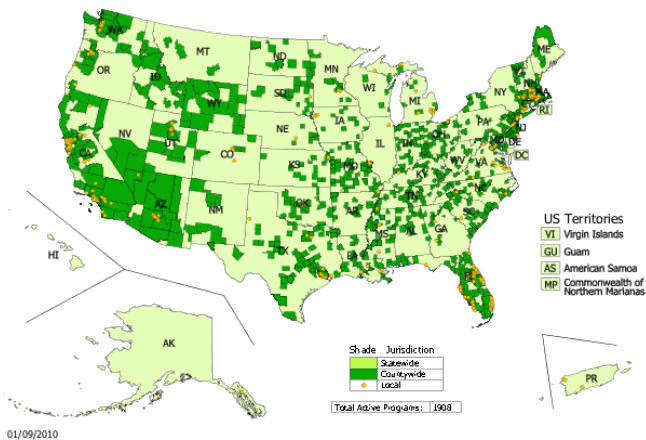
For more information, please contact Jolene Dayton (jhdayton@cox.net).

CERT Grows by Leaps and Bounds

A significant number of trained CERTs have been popping up across the country in recent years. In 2005, there were 1,908 CERT programs in the national CERT registry (including Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands). In 2009, there were 3,428.

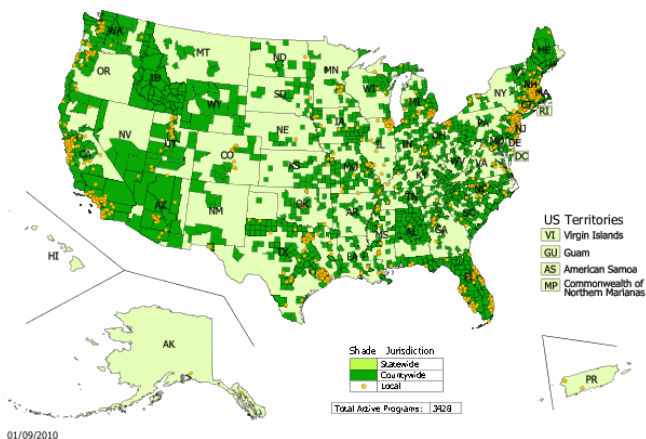
2005

Community Emergency Response Teams



2009

Community Emergency Response Teams



In many ways, CERT growth can be attributed to the fundamental desire to help others. In 2005, the country watched as Hurricane Katrina devastated Louisiana, but some people

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West Virginia Teen Uses CERT Training to Save Life *(Continued from page 2)*

In April 2007, when A.C. was just 12 years old, he became one of the first and youngest members trained for the Tyler County CERT. That CERT began with 65 people in the first training session, including A.C.'s mom, dad, and brother. "We have had eight people between the ages of 12 and 18 take our CERT training," says Thomas Cooper, Director of the Tyler County Office of Emergency Management. "They go through the same program as the adults. I have been very impressed with their interest and participation. They bring young energy to our team."

Since the incident last November, A.C. has been volunteering with Tyler County Emergency Management to help start Teen CERT training at his school. Cooper said the goal of the Teen CERT training is to "include the group in the school's emergency response plans. They will be given special tasks such as assisting special needs students during school evacuations." To date, A.C. has encouraged more than 40 of his classmates to sign up for the Teen CERT training.

CERT members in Tyler County are a highly trained group. Many of the members have received advanced training in mass care triage, first aid, CPR, AED, the National Weather Service's SKYWARN program, and decontamination shelter setup. "A large number of CERT members have become well-trained search and rescue technicians," said Cooper. "This has helped build our SAR team into a very active regional resource serving the entire northeastern part of West Virginia."

A.C.'s CERT training and quick thinking proved to be invaluable last November. When asked about his training and his participation in the CERT program, A.C.'s response was clear: "CERT gives you the ability to help people."

For more information, please contact Tom Cooper (tjcooper@verizon.net).

“Most people would panic, but I knew what to do.”

– A.C. Carse

CERT Grows by Leaps and Bounds *(Continued from page 5)*

didn't just watch—they took action. This fact will always be true: volunteerism increases after a disaster.

But that doesn't tell the whole story. Many states are actively working to increase their CERT numbers. Illinois, for example, had one local CERT program in 2005 and by the end of 2009 had 58 local programs. Other states are experiencing similar growth. The following table illustrates the top five states of CERT growth in number of teams over a 5-year period.

State	2005	2009
Georgia	18	54
Illinois	1	58
Maine	7	41
Michigan	18	92
New Hampshire	4	24

So how did they do it? To answer this question, we spoke to CERT representatives in each of these states. Several common themes emerged from these interviews.

1. Fund by Region

While some states may prefer to manage their CERT funds at the state level, many states are finding success in regionalizing the CERT program. In Michigan, for example, the state has been divided into seven regions. "The regions determine how their share of the money is spent," said Sgt. Kevin Sweeney, State of Michigan CERT Program and Citizen Corps Director. "Regionalization has helped stretch the dollar further."

Regions (or counties) are often in a good position to tailor programs to meet the unique needs of the community. For instance, many of the CERTs in Maine have established specialty jobs that require advanced training, such as the County Animal Response Teams, amateur radio operators, and emergency communications groups.

States with successful regional programs have also discovered that regionalizing tends to speed up the decision-making process and allows them to fulfill requests and take action more quickly.

2. Listen to Local Input

States that have successfully grown their CERT programs have discovered that listening to and meeting the needs of local residents are important aspects of growth.

Jami Leverett, Volunteer Programs Coordinator for Georgia, goes out and meets with CERT instructors at least once a year to talk about their programs, discuss what other CERTs are doing, and listen to their ideas. "I believe in letting the locals do their own program," says Leverett. "[But] you need to get out there and be visible and talk to them."

Michigan holds monthly focus groups with two members from each region to get recommendations for how resources should be divided and how things should be managed. "We listen to the CERT coordinators and give them what they need," says Sweeney. Michigan now holds an annual conference at the request of the focus group.

In Maine, State CERT Coordinator Jeremy Damren attributes much of the program's growth to listening to the county directors. Of his predecessor, Damren said, "She met with each county director individually to get their buy-in and provide what they needed."

In Illinois, the state office runs reports on all local CERTs to ensure that they have accurate information. The reports offer details on all facets of their programs and what is being implemented on a local level. "I think that has al-



Illinois CERT conducts a search and rescue exercise

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CERT Grows by Leaps and Bounds *(Continued from page 6)*

lowed us to have a more accurate picture of what has been going on at the local level,” said Michelle Haneken, Illinois Homeland Security and Citizen Corps Program Manager.

“It is the local CERT coordinators and members that make the difference,” said Sweeney.



CERT members participating in an exercise at the CERT Games in May

3. Leverage Partnerships

Another common theme among successful states is the ability to leverage partnerships. Partnering with other services as well as other volunteer groups has provided mutually beneficial relationships.

In New Hampshire, the CERT Program is taught by the fire academy. This provides a win-win situation for both services, allowing firefighters to reap the benefit of a well-trained CERT support system and helping CERT defray the cost of training. This relationship also adds credibility to the CERT program because members are trained by the highly respected fire academy.

New Hampshire has also discovered the value of partnering CERT with other volunteer groups. Director of New Hampshire Citizen Corps Domenic DiNatale said, “If we can collaborate somehow, instead of you paying and me paying for the same thing, we can use the same resources for both of our programs.” This has included using the same trainers and equipment for courses with the fire academy.

In Georgia, CERT has become more visible in the school system due to a partnership with the Department of Edu-

cation. Health occupation and public safety teachers are invited to attend CERT training. The goal is to have CERT-trained members in the schools to not only promote the program, but also to be of assistance if the need arises.

Illinois is preparing to hold their first statewide rodeo to foster communication between CERTs. Regional CERT managers also meet quarterly to find commonalities in their programs. “That type of environment really seems to foster a lot of programs in the area,” said Michelle Haneken.

4. Keep Members Interested and Engaged

Trained CERT members may not have an opportunity to fully exercise their skills until a disaster strikes. This predicament requires directors to be creative in keeping members interested in the program. To keep CERT members engaged, successful local programs and their states provide:

- Advanced training available to all members
- State-sponsored events (such as conferences, challenge events, competitions, games)
- Awards (such as top coordinator, top team, top volunteer)
- Teen and school CERT training
- Newsletters highlighting the CERT members and CERT programs



Shelter exercise in Oxford County, Maine

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Addressing the H1N1 Threat



*CERT members assisting patients with paperwork in Ft. Myers
(Photo courtesy of the Fort Myers News-Press)*

The H1N1 strain of the influenza virus dominated the headlines and the thoughts of the public for much of 2009. Several thousand flu-related deaths in the United States alone have caused lingering fears of an unprecedented outbreak. While the threat is real and deadly, CERT response has been exceptional. With H1N1 still considered in the pandemic phase by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), CERTs across the country have reacted in a variety of ways to prepare their communities for a potential outbreak. CERT members have staffed clinics, answered citizen phone calls, and trained for points of distribution (POD).

Lee County, Fla., CERTs performed wide-ranging duties at 27 clinics around the county. They served as parking lot attendants, registered patients, assisted with paperwork, and directed patients around the clinic. “CERT members were really the pivotal point in the volunteer effort,” said Josh Roberts, Emergency Management Coordinator for Lee County. “We received numerous positive comments about the members and how valuable they were.”

In order to staff the clinics, CERT members arrived at their sites an hour before their shifts were to begin to receive “just in time” training. This enabled them to learn the necessary information for their specific positions without requiring any extra scheduling by the volunteers or clinic coordinators. According to Roberts, it was hectic in the beginning, but CERT members caught on quickly, and returning members were able to help newcomers with their positions.

CERT members were invaluable in keeping the clinics running smoothly, said Roberts. “[I] don’t think we heard a negative comment. And when you have 27 clinics servicing approximately 40,000 people, that’s unheard of.”

Persons from multiple organizations volunteered for over 6,000 hours, with CERT members accounting for 2,000 of those hours. The majority of CERT members came from

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CERT Grows by Leaps and Bounds *(Continued from page 7)*

Maine thankfully doesn’t see many disasters, which makes it all the more important to keep CERT members active and interested in other aspects of emergency management. They hold regular exercises and hold a state-wide jamboree each year. “Keep the CERT members entertained,” said Jeremy Damren. “Make them feel utilized and incorporate them into trainings. Just do what is necessary to keep them interested.”

5. Be Supportive

The CERT state directors with whom we spoke all agreed that one of the most important ways to provide an environment that fosters growth is to be supportive of local CERT programs. There are many ways to provide support:

- Attend local CERT events
- Help local CERTs advertise their programs, initiatives, and accomplishments
- Be flexible
- Bring training and services to the members at the local level

In just 5 years we have seen CERT grow impressively across the country. In the next 5 years, who knows how large CERT may grow? No matter the number, CERTs across the country will continue to be out in their communities offering support, helping others, and making a difference.

Addressing the H1N1 Threat *(Continued from page 8)*

Cape Coral, whose 45 members contributed 600 hours. Cape Coral members handled parking lot and hallway duties, assisting in keeping the flow of patients going. Mindy Blasetti, Emergency Management Coordinator for Cape Coral, visited all of the city's clinics, in addition to frequently working with the CERT members. "They are our city's volunteer group, and when we knew they [Department of Health] wanted to get through as many [people] as possible, we knew they could do it. Everybody that came through couldn't believe how smoothly it ran and how easily it all went," she said.



Nassau County CERT members working at an incident command post

CERT members in Nassau County, N.Y., staffed call centers run by the Department of Health. CERT members received training on following a script for callers. Citizens called in with questions on virus and clinic locations, operating hours, and requirements. If their queries went beyond the script, members transferred them to health professionals. CERT members have staffed call centers for other issues in the past. "[We] can broaden the call center with [CERT] members," said Bob Beckman, Director of CERT in Nassau County. They began addressing H1N1 callers in March 2009.

Beckman stressed the importance of their collaboration with the Department of Health, which is co-located with the Emergency Management Office. "We do everything in conjunction with DOH, and DOH prepared the call center," said Beckmann. The Emergency Management Office is beginning to team with DOH on POD training as well as further

preparing CERT members for emergency response.

Georgia began points of distribution training several years ago. As the state has a CERT volunteer force of more than 300, "it stood to reason to tap into this resource," said Captain Stan Pye of the Peachtree City Police Department.

"We got together a while back and realized that whether it's H1N1 or anything else, we just don't have the resources to manage a POD," said Pye. One of the goals is to learn to use a POD for anything from medicine to supplies. "We took CERT members with a base skill, gave them a little training, told them what a POD is and how it operates, and today we have our own call-out list," said Pye.

POD training involves a 3- or 4-hour class to give background and explain how a POD works. Trainees then do POD drills. In the past this has included practicing distribution points for an anthrax scare. "Over the years we've got a good bit of exposure to that kind of stuff with our CERT membership," said Pye. Now, in the event of an H1N1 outbreak, DOH could staff a clinic with CERT members. And while it is designed for H1N1, the training and skills could be easily adapted for other threats.

This holds true for local CERT programs in Florida, New York, and other locations that have prepared for H1N1. They have also prepared themselves to respond to future events in whatever way they may be needed.

For more information about H1N1, and to learn how to protect yourself and your family, visit the Centers for Disease Control Web site: <http://cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>. For more information about the CERT programs featured in this article, please contact Cpt. Stan Pye (peten@fayettecountyga.gov), Mindy Blasetti (mblasetti@capecoral.net), Josh Roberts (jroberts@leegov.com), or Robert Beckmann (rbeckmann@nassau-countyny.gov)

“**CERT members were really the pivotal point in the volunteer effort.**”

– Lee County Emergency Management Coordinator
Josh Roberts

FAQ

Q: What if I have concerns about my age or physical ability?

A: All CERT participants have different levels of physical ability and strength. Each person needs to be realistic about any limitations he or she may have. It's important for both the CERT member's personal safety and for the success of the mission. However, regardless of physical ability, there is a role for every person in CERT.

During CERT basic training in the classroom, anyone who has a concern about a particular skill, such as lifting a person who has been injured, should let the instructor know. The hands-on portion of the classroom training is a great opportunity for each participant to observe the skills in practice and to confirm their own capability to perform the activity safely. Remember that rescuer safety is the top priority for CERT members.

After you've completed the basic training, you'll see that CERT activities before, during, and after a disaster will require a broad range of skills. Many of these activities do not require significant physical abilities.

- Non-disaster-related team activities may include promoting emergency preparedness in your community, developing and maintaining a Web site for your program, helping with special events, or other administrative assistance to the CERT program coordinator.
- During disaster response, individuals who have physical limitations may handle critical assignments at the team's command post, such as assisting with planning and documenting the team's activities, registering team members as they arrive, tracking supplies and equipment, or managing radio communications for the team leader.
- Following a disaster, CERT members are needed to help with documentation and after-action evaluation of the CERT's response.

These are just a few examples of how people of all abilities can help ensure the safety and security of their neighborhoods and workplaces. We want everyone who wants to be involved to have an opportunity to take the training, learn the skills, and participate in CERT.

Submitting Stories to the National CERT Newsletter

The National CERT Newsletter is published quarterly and welcomes stories from local, state, tribal, and territorial CERT Programs. For example:

- CERT in Action – Activations in actual emergencies
- CERT exercises you have conducted
- A CERT member who has gone above and beyond the call of duty
- Community awards/commendations your CERT Program/teams have received
- Innovative ways you have dealt with challenges in your CERT Program

When submitting a story, please include:

- City/state of event
- Names of people/organizations involved
- Date(s) of activity
- Author's contact information
- Other relevant information

Format: Articles should be between 50 and 150 words. Submit text as a Microsoft Word file or paste article text directly to e-mail. (PDF files cannot be used.)

Photos: Submit as an e-mail attachment in JPG or TIF file format. Include names of people in photo and a description of what they are doing and why. Please provide only photos approved for publication.

Deadline: Articles considered for the next publication must be received by May 31, 2010. Send your articles to cert@dhs.gov. Include in subject line: "Submission for CERT Newsletter."

Note: CERT retains the right to edit all stories for length, clarity, and accuracy.

Acceptance: Publication of submitted materials is based on a variety of factors, including but not limited to timeliness, space available, completeness of information, and relevance.