



# National NEWSLETTER

Vol. 1 – Issue 2

## Mountain View, CA CERT Reaches Out to Chinese Population



Sample slides from the CERT Basic Training in Mandarin.

CERT has gone global, so to speak. The demand for foreign-language emergency training programs is growing rapidly in our era of high international mobility, and CERT is actively responding to that demand in many areas of the country.

Mr. Lynn Brown, the Office of Emergency Services (OES) coordinator for Mountain View, California, outlined his office's response to its increasingly diverse community in a September interview. "Spanish was

extremely in demand, so we've had a Spanish CERT class for five or six years now," he said. "And our first Mandarin CERT class was run in May of this year."

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## NYC Mayor Bloomberg Celebrates CERT

The New York City CERT Program marked its fifth anniversary with a barbecue hosted by Mayor Michael Bloomberg on June 11, 2008. The large crowd of team members, instructors, and special guests gathered at the mayor's official residence served as a fitting example of CERT's importance throughout the New York City community.

The mayor welcomed CERT members from all five boroughs to Gracie Mansion for the evening of celebration, which included music, speeches, and a quiz game. The game, "Test the Guests," featured questions about emergency preparedness and CERT knowledge. It proved to be a big hit with the CERT crowd and allowed the mayor to showcase his humorous side.

The NYC CERT Program has seen rapid growth since its inception five years ago. It now boasts 60 teams comprising over 1,000 trained volunteers. Mayor Bloomberg's warm thank-you to NYC CERT members for "everything you do to keep us safe and secure" was a highlight of the evening. CERT attendees felt recognized for their commitment, skill, and contributions to New York City's culture of preparedness.



Mayor Bloomberg hosts the CERT barbecue at his official residence on June 11.

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Brown worked in conjunction with the local Outreach Office to find area Mandarin speakers who had already received CERT training in English. These Chinese Americans were then trained to become CERT instructors. Brown designed the course on emergency preparedness together with Mountain View's Community Outreach Coordinator, Blanca Cinco, and the material was translated by volunteers from the Tzu Chi Foundation.

The Mountain View approach to establishing a Mandarin CERT class was in large part informed by their experiences with the Spanish-language class. "We had tried using an interpreter, as well as simultaneous translation headsets similar to those used in the United Nations," noted Brown, but

class evaluation forms indicated that students felt there was a more effective way of communicating the information. "It was taking too much time to go back and forth between the instructor and the interpreter, and even when the headsets were used, the trainers were forced to speak much more slowly," Brown explained. He added that creating a class where students could learn directly from a trainer in their native language simply "made sense."

To that end, 30 native Mandarin speakers gathered at the Mountain View Fire Department in May to attend a CERT training course specifically tailored to meet their language needs. The students, who varied in age from 19-year-old college students to retirees, gathered for three consecutive weekends to complete the training. Snacks of Chinese almond cookies and tea sweetened the deal. This nod to cultural preference—pan dulce was served in Spanish-language classes, and bagels and coffee were presented at classes conducted in English—is a tiny detail that nonetheless speaks to Mountain View's conscientious inclusion of Chinese Americans.

The response to the Mandarin training course was over-

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## Greetings from the National CERT Program

Hello CERT Members, Program Advocates, and State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial CERT Program Coordinators:

Holiday greetings to all of you! 2008 has been quite a year for the CERT Program across the country. The CERT national registry has grown to 3,105, an increase of 15 percent in the past 12 months. Local CERT Programs have reported ever-increasing numbers of CERT exercises, as well as activations to assist professional responders during emergencies such as Tropical Storm Fay in DeBary, Florida, a tornado that hit Kansas in June, and Hurricanes Gustav and Ike in Louisiana (see article on page 4).

CERTs have also supported professional responders with significant public safety efforts, such as those required at the U.S. Olympic Track & Field Trials in Eugene, Oregon (see article on page 6). Local teams have also provided a range of community services, such as assistance to the Meals on Wheels Association when it faced a critical volunteer shortage.

At the national level, the CERT Program has updated the CERT Basic Training Course and three new supplemental training modules, as well as a new standard CERT Train-the-Trainer Course. We look forward to posting all of these on the national CERT website in the first quarter of 2009.

In the coming year, we also look forward to developing additional supplemental training modules and a new CERT Program Manager Course, as well as further updates to the national CERT website and other tools for local programs. We hope that the New Year will bring continued growth and more of the great enthusiasm that has always infused CERT across the country.

Our sincere thanks to every CERT member, trainer, program coordinator, and advocate for making the CERT Program a success. It is your ongoing energy and commitment that make it work.



## Sacramento, CA Exercise Highlights Use of CERT Responders in Disasters



*CERT volunteers practice watercraft rescue.*

*Corey McKenna, Editor, online newsletter, Government Technology's Emergency Management News; Andy Cruz, Photographer*

According to the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency, the Sacramento area faces a high risk of flooding. In the event of a large-scale flood, first responders may become overwhelmed with response and recovery missions and may even be prevented from accessing certain areas due to flooded roads and other obstacles. This makes trained volunteers a critical part of the emergency response system. To that end, an exercise conducted on September 13, 2008 gave CERTs a chance to work together in responding to a large-scale simulated disaster.

“We had CERT members who participated in the exercise with years of CERT training and then we had CERT members that were brand new—just completed their CERT training the day before the exercise,” noted Geoff Winford, Sacramento regional CERT coordinator and logistics coordinator for the exercise. The scenario included the bursting of the upstream Folsom Dam with a number of “victims” trapped on land and near water for several hours. “We’ve done collapsed buildings and large incidents like that before, but we’ve never had an exercise that featured water rescue like this.” Doing this

exercise makes sense, “due to Sacramento’s high risk of flooding,” Winford explained. He added that, because of the area’s levee system and waterways, dam breaks or massive hundred-year floods that have been predicted would require more help than professional responders might be able to provide. “The water rescue skill sets we were trained on are basic and easily learned by volunteers, but they’re enough for somebody to do the job if they need to in a disaster situation,” he explained.

The exercise was very successful. Professional responders provided incident command for the volunteers, and CERT members used skills they drilled the previous day including how to make sandbags, how to perform watercraft rescue, and how to perform rope rescue. They rescued more than 100 “victims” trapped in and around the American River Parkway.

A few lessons learned and discussed at the end of the event were the need for team leaders to make command decisions more quickly and for teams to be able to prepare more quickly for a new assignment after completing a task. Finally, illustrating the use of a human element to parallel technology, the use of volunteer runners at the incident command center worked well in facilitating communications inside the command post.



## CERTs Provide Critical Support During Gustav and Ike



The Iberia Parish CERTs spent 24 hours one long day and night in August 2008 as Hurricane Gustav threatened to strike the Louisiana Coast. Fifteen CERT volunteers activated to assist with registering, feeding, and boarding 1,200 Iberia Parish residents with disabilities or without access to transportation of their own. The residents boarded 33 buses to take them to shelters in North Louisiana. The CERT volunteers stayed throughout the night to ensure that all residents needing assistance were safely out of the path of Gustav and they were very successful. CERT co-coordinator Zack Mitchell said, “CERTs stepped to the front of the line because they are a well-organized team. They understood the work that needed to get done to make sure that all people were safe and out of harm’s way.”

Not only did CERTs provide assistance with a safe and successful evacuation out of town, they also greeted the returning residents and assisted them with a range of needs. Zack Mitchell said that if it wasn’t for the CERTs stepping up and taking charge, the evacuation and return home would not have gone so smoothly. “CERTs gave so much of themselves. They have the right attitude for helping others out and they understand the critical mission at hand.”

Hurricane Ike followed closely behind Gustav and the CERTs once again stepped up to the task. CERT members quickly set up local shelter operations for residents in the Iberia Parish and from the other local coastal parishes. The CERT members were responsible for opening up and managing the shelters for 3 full days until the Red Cross arrived and took over the operations. Zack Mitchell said the CERT volunteers knew exactly what needed to be done to get the shelters up and running because of their commitment to the safety of the community and their CERT training.

## Mountain View, CA CERT Reaches Out to Chinese Population

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whelmingly positive. Brown commented that one of the remarkable things about the 30 students who attended was their geographic diversity. They hailed from “all over the Bay area—from Palo Alto, Sunnyvale, and Milpitas, and of course Mountain View itself.” Asians compose 20 percent of the city’s population and, of those, a third are Chinese. As Michele Lu, one of CERT’s volunteer trainers, remarked, “Chinese are a big part of this community, so we should give them a chance to know this training.” CERT student June Ho called the class “very important to me [and] important to our community.” Most of the area’s Chinese Americans speak some English, but “it’s just easier for them to grasp the concepts quicker when the CERT course is taught in their native language,” said Brown. He added that this was particularly true for seniors, who “really need to learn how to help themselves during an emergency,” using her own elderly mother—a native Mandarin speaker—as an example.

The May class has been the only Mandarin-language course offered in Mountain View to date, but Brown says that he is excited about the possibility of another. Both the foreign-language and English versions of the CERT course are fully funded by the Mountain View Fire Department budget. Graduates of the training receive a city hard hat, CERT vest, leather gloves, and safety glasses or goggles. CERT was established in Mountain View in 1990.

If you would like to learn more about the Mountain View, CA CERT Program, contact Mr. Lynn Brown at 650-903-6825 or [Lynn.Brown@mountainview.gov](mailto:Lynn.Brown@mountainview.gov). Mr. Brown will be happy to hear from people who are interested in the training he conducted in Mandarin.



## Local CERT Exercises



*SCC CERT members plan during a mock hurricane exercise in Spartanburg, SC.*

### Spartanburg Community College Puts Faculty and Staff to the Test

*Gary Glancy, Writer; Mike Bonner, Photographer*

No one looks forward to a disaster occurring in their community, but faculty and staff at Spartanburg Community College (SCC) in South Carolina were excited to participate in a mock hurricane exercise on Oct. 2, 2008.

In the exercise, a hurricane was headed toward campus, spawning tornadoes and striking SCC's Student Services Building. This exercise was the culmination of invaluable training that faculty and staff received to help prepare for a real emergency.

"Everybody is excited," said Judy Martin, Health Care Program Director for corporate and community education at SCC, before the drill. Martin was one

of about 25 SCC faculty and staffers – plus one student leader – to go through the three-week Campus CERT training administered by the Spartanburg County Office of Emergency Management. SCC is the first college in the state to complete a campus-wide CERT course, and Spartanburg CERT coordinator Robbie Swofford said he hopes to conduct the training with other local higher-education institutions beginning next semester.

The CERT class was voluntary for SCC faculty and staff, and those who completed it gave up their Tuesday and Thursday evenings for three weeks to attend the classroom training. "They've been a very enthusiastic class," Swofford said. "Everybody who was in there wanted to do it. That's something I always stress for any college that wants to do it – you want to be sure that people in your class actually want to be there.

If you make it mandatory, then, unfortunately, a lot of the people who are there will be less than enthusiastic about it."

Kim Fogle, administrative assistant with the SCC Foundation, said she initially signed up because she wanted to be able to help people. However, she found the training to be even more critical than she initially thought. "After the first class, I realized that my family and I are not prepared for a disaster," Fogle said. "It really opened my eyes."

The Spartanburg CERT Program was adopted by Swofford's department three years ago and has grown to more than 350 trained members countywide. They include members of several local churches, festival and fair committees, and now the SCC group. The program "better prepares schools to respond to emergencies by giving them the basic skill sets they need to have to be a resource during a critical time of need," Swofford said.

"They learn a lot of basic skills that will enhance their ability to respond to an emergency, whether it is a natural disaster or manmade disaster, and that they'll have the basic tools in place to at least be the initial response," Swofford said. "Until those professional responders can arrive – the fire department, EMS – there's always that window there, especially from a campus standpoint, so it's really critical that they have trained members of their faculty and student body that can say, 'I know what to do. I know how to at least keep this situation stable until additional assistance can arrive.' That's really our main focus."

## CERT Supports Olympic Trials in Eugene, OR

The 2008 U.S. Olympic Trials were held this year in Eugene, Oregon, from June 27 through July 6. Sixty-four volunteers of the Eugene CERT from Eugene and Springfield participated in the event, fulfilling a variety of roles. The CERT was activated by the City of Eugene to support the Eugene Fire Department and the American Red Cross, and to be on-hand in the event of a mass casualty incident. Participating volunteers passed city background checks and an FBI background check.

Due to shortages from other volunteer groups and the huge crowd surges, CERT's duties were expanded to such functions as bag checking, wand, crowd control, and traffic control. CERT volunteers also played a large part in general public relations, providing directions, helping lost individuals, pointing out sources of water, and helping those with special needs.

Although volunteers were expected to work four-hour shifts (plus briefings and debriefings), many worked extra shifts or longer shifts. Some dedicated individuals volunteered 10 hours a day! CERT volunteers proved to be extremely dependable from among the 2,500 credentialed volunteers, and the number of CERT volunteers increased throughout the event.

The CERT members worked in 8- or 16-person groups per shift, depending on anticipated attendance, which often exceeded 25,000 people. CERTs were radio-dispatched with paramedics into the crowds whenever there was a medical need. The CERTs primarily communicated via cell phones; however, a CERT amateur radio operator was

attached to each shift to provide communications support. Smaller groups of two to four volunteers patrolled the perimeter of Hayward Field and the festival area with emergency packs and extra water.



*A CERT volunteer does security screening at the entrance to the venue. Photo provided courtesy of Emerald Photographic Society.*

On days that the temperatures soared to over 95 degrees, CERT volunteers ran a brigade of wheelchairs, caring for attendees suffering from heat exhaustion. CERT became the "go-to" group wherever there was a shortage of personnel in any support area, helping to sweep buses for worrisome parcels, monitoring passengers as they boarded or deboarded shuttles, and handing out 600 bikes at the Bike Valet Park at the end of the daily events.

It became readily apparent that multiple-day, large-scale events such as the Olympic Trials need CERT. They bridge the gap between first aid and the para-

medics; they can be depended upon to support a variety of tasks and shore up almost any needs that may arise. The CERT volunteers at the Olympic Trials were incredibly dedicated and highly motivated, and played an important role in the event.

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## CERT Member Elected to Oak Park, CA Municipal Advisory Council

CERT member Derek Ross was recently elected to the Oak Park Municipal Advisory Council in Ventura County, California, where he promised to give priority to promoting awareness about disaster preparedness. "We need to create a community of citizen first responders who have received formal training in the field of preparedness," he said.

To achieve this goal, Ross intends to target homeowners associations and area businesses. His hope is twofold: In addition to becoming partners in emergency preparedness, the two groups will also work together to make their shared community a better place to live and work.

Ross also intends to recruit local youth to the Teen CERT training because he believes the experience will provide an appreciation of community preparedness to last a lifetime. "We need to make sure that we've got the ability to combine our resources and take advantage of all of the wonderful people that live around us," he said.



## Local CERT Training



*CERT members practice medical operations during the mass casualty drill in Lucas County.  
Photo courtesy of the Toledo Free Press.*

### Lucas County, OH CERT: Prepared for the Worst

On the weekend of May 16, 2008, the scenes of destruction enacted at Lucas County CERT's training grounds put Hollywood to shame. Mass casualty drills were run with military precision as team members refreshed their life-saving skills in first aid, search and rescue, and fire suppression. During the drills, a mock city located at the Owens Center for Emergency Preparedness, in Toledo, OH, was submitted to every kind of dramatic disaster, from shootings and refinery explosions to F3 tornadoes, fires, and chemical spills.

This mandatory refresher course is conducted annually in Lucas County, and CERT members seeking recertification must participate in one mass casualty drill every three years. Such

a requirement helps team members review important skills and ensures that they do not “fall into apathy that ‘it will never happen here’—because it can,” said CERT instructor Herbert Moore. He cautioned that “the people in CERT do not profess to be professionals; they are volunteers. [We] are basically a stopgap until the professionals come in.” CERT members are ordinary people who bring skills learned in their everyday lives and use them in conjunction with emergency response training to help their community during disaster situations.

Each drill required participants to spend eight to twelve hours at the site completing their assigned scenarios. The grueling days were well-rewarded, however, according to Lucas County CERT Program Director Shelley Hoelzer-Spahn. “Everyone did exceptionally well,” she

said. “I’m pleased with everyone’s progress.” CERT member Joe Zielinski stressed the difference between practicing for a crisis situation and assisting in an actual disaster. “When you actually have to do this stuff you realize it is a little harder,” he remarked. “It’s important for people to feel they are ready, and to be ready you have to have practice.” The hands-on training allowed CERT members to use the equipment, teamwork, and specialized skills needed during a real crisis. “Anything that can cause a mass casualty [is] addressed in one form or another,” said Moore, stressing that “we cover topics a person can do with little or no equipment—just the basic knowledge they’re taught at a CERT class.”

“ ***The people in CERT do not profess to be professionals; they are volunteers. We are basically a stopgap until the professionals come in.*** ”

This marked the first year that the drills spanned an entire weekend, beginning on May 16th and running through May 18th. The extra time allowed participants to review more scenarios and emergency response topics than previously possible. Damage assessment was one such topic. Director Hoelzer-Spahn declared the weekend “a success” for the Lucas County CERT, a program that began in 2003 and has trained over 900 people since its inception.

## Local CERT Training *(Continued from page 7)*



*Graduates of Bergen County's special needs CERT class pose at the County Plaza in Hackensack.*

### **Bergen County, NJ Graduates Special Needs CERT**

For the second time in Bergen County, NJ, people with special needs have been included in a special definition of "community." Twenty proud graduates lined the stage at the County Plaza in Hackensack on May 28, 2008, and awaited recognition at the graduation ceremony that marked their initiation into the ranks of CERT.

These men and women are only the second group of people with disabilities to receive CERT training in the state of New Jersey. "Bergen County was the first county in New Jersey to move forward with this effort, which is now a model for training individuals with disabilities statewide," explained Valerie Williams Dargan, Ph.D., Bergen County Department of Human Services Director.

Agencies such as Heightened Independence and Progress, Spectrum for Living, and the Careers Through Technology Program collaborated with the Disability Services Division of Bergen County's Department of Human Services and the county's Office of Emergency Management in an effort to educate disabled citizens in community crisis response. According to Bergen County Executive Dennis McNerney, "Individuals with various disabilities were invited by these agencies to participate in the training."

Director of Disability Services James Thebery led his students in developing a skill set that would benefit themselves, their families, and their communities during times of crisis. "This is [an] example of a win-win situation where instructors became more attuned to the

needs of persons with disabilities in a disaster situation, and participants with disabilities attained certification in emergency response," said Thebery. "These graduates can now assist other persons with disabilities to be better prepared in the event of an actual emergency situation."

New Jersey leads the nation with over 400 CERT Programs and 15,000 CERT-trained citizens. In sheer numbers, the state itself is led by Bergen County. The community boasts over 2,000 CERT volunteers, more than any other New Jersey county. As of May 28, that number rose by 20!



## FAQ

**Q:** Is CERT participation transferable from one community to another?

**A:** Local CERT Programs determine their requirements for recognizing training that a volunteer completed in another community and the policy differs among local programs. Although all CERT Programs cover the topics in the CERT Basic Training Course, local training may vary based on community-specific hazards, protocols, etc. Since the CERT curriculum can be modified to the specific needs of the community, a CERT member from another community may need to take some or all of the training again to learn the additional local information and protocols. In other cases, a local program may require some training in addition to the topics covered in the standard CERT Basic Training Course (e.g., CPR and AED training). A CERT member moving to a community with these requirements would need to complete them before becoming “officially CERT” in his or her new community.

If you are moving to a new community with a CERT Program, plan to participate there! Preparing for the transition from one program to another is easy—just make sure that you have documentation that you took the CERT Basic Training (such as your certificate of completion) and also the contact information for the person who manages the CERT Program in the community you’re leaving.

In your new community, contact the local CERT Program Manager to introduce yourself. Inform him or her about your CERT training and inquire about how to get involved in the local program. You may need to provide a copy of your CERT Basic Training certificate, re-take the training, participate in the final exercise, complete some additional training, or some combination of these. If you need to re-take any part of the basic training, it will be a good source of information about your new community and a great refresher of your CERT skills!

## 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:

- Your CERT in Action – Activations in actual emergencies or for non-emergency community service projects
- 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 January 31, 2009. Send your articles to [CERT@dhs.gov](mailto: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.