

COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM GUIDEBOOK



Vermont CERT Program
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INTRODUCTION

The Vermont Department of Public Safety and the Vermont Citizen Corps program has developed this guidance document in an effort to assist local Citizen Corps Councils via Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPC), and local CERT Program Directors in continuing development and expanding their existing CERT programs.

Team structures will vary depending on location. This document is not developed with the idea that "local control" be usurped. It is developed as a tool for those continuing to develop their programs.

CERT MISSION STATEMENT

To educate citizens to be better prepared to take care of themselves, family friends and neighbors in the event of a disaster of any type until trained emergency responders can arrive. To establish Community Emergency Response Teams as emergency management resources, volunteer pools to help during an emergency, and to perform projects that improve a community's preparedness.

OVERVIEW

A Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) is formed by the local Citizen Corps Council that may be supported through the local LEPC. To better prepare their communities for the hazards that threaten their communities and the state: "Neighbor Helping Neighbor".

The CERT course will benefit any citizen who takes it. They will be better prepared to react to and cope with the aftermath of a disaster and provide self help until first responders can assist. Additionally, if a community wants to supplement its response capability after a disaster, civilians can be recruited and trained as neighborhood, county, business and government teams that can also assist.

The CERT program continues to expand nationwide. CERT is a part of the USA Freedom Corps an initiative developed by President Bush as a result of the events of September 11, 2001. The CERT program was initiated in the State of Vermont in December of 2002. The program continues to grow nationally and in the state of Vermont.

STARTING A COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

Steps to start a CERT:

- ⇒ Identify the program goals CERT will meet and the resources available to conduct the program in your area
- ⇒ Gain approval from the local Citizen Corps Council to create a CERT to meet the needs of the community
- ⇒ Identify and recruit potential participants and develop a team
- ⇒ Prepare By-Laws (utilizing the State's standard template)
- ⇒ Identify CERT instructors
- ⇒ Conduct CERT training sessions
- ⇒ Hold regular team meetings to discuss training and community involvement

FUNDING AND STRUCTURE OF CERT PROGRAMS IN VT

Congress continues to provide Federal grant funding through the Citizen Corps Program under the Department of Homeland Security Grant Program to States and Territories. Funds from these Federal grants are currently available for local communities to start and maintain CERT programs. Funds are funneled through Vermont Emergency Management (VEM). However, as with any Federal program long term funding may not always be available. CERT programs should explore ways within their LEPC's to ensure long term viability.

Team structure will vary depending on a number of different factors such as location of team membership, team sponsors etc. Several teams may opt to divide their trained CERT volunteers into sub teams around their county along with having several members on a Communication team to take advantage of the team membership in the community.

CERT MEMBERSHIP

Once a citizen has completed the CERT Basic Course they may contact their local CERT program director and apply to become a member of the team. Membership to a team indicates the team member will be able to attend 75% of the scheduled meetings and be willing to follow through on any training requirements set forward by the team.

CERT MEETINGS

Each CERT program director works with their team and the Citizen Corps Chairperson to develop training and meeting dates. Each CERT program must meet monthly or bi-monthly; these meetings should include workshop or classroom training to reflect the continued education needs of the team for response. Meeting leadership will produce meeting minutes and attendance rosters that will be sent to the State Citizen Corps Coordinator at VEM within two (2) weeks of each meeting.

TRAINING

The Basic CERT training is offered throughout the state several times a year. The training calendar is available at www.dps.sate.vt.us/vem/training/ or contact your local CERT Program Director. The general CERT topics are as follows:

- ✓ **DISASTER PREPAREDNESS:** Addresses hazards to which people are vulnerable in their community. This unit covers actions that participants and their families take before, during and after a disaster.
- ✓ **DISASTER FIRE SUPPRESSION:** Briefly covers fire chemistry, hazardous materials, fire hazards, and fire suppression strategies. However, the thrust of this session is the safe use of fire extinguishers, sizing up the situation, controlling utilities, and extinguishing a small fire.
- ✓ **DISASTER MEDICAL:** this unit focuses on basic first aid and triage.
- ✓ **LIGHT SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS:** Participants learn about search and rescue planning, size-up, search techniques, rescue techniques, and most important, rescuer safety.
- ✓ **CERT TEAM ORGANIZATION:** This unit addresses the aspects of the CERT organization and management principles and need for documentation. It will also discuss local and state policy and procedures.
- ✓ **DISASTER PSYCHOLOGY:** Participants will discuss the signs and symptoms that might be experienced by the disaster victim and worker. Participants will be given strategies on for working in a disaster setting.
- ✓ **COURSE REVIEW AND DISASTER SIMULATION:** Participants review the course goals and discuss how this training will support their preparedness and their community preparedness. Participants will then participate in a final simulated response exercise using their skills learned.

During each session, participants are provided with safety equipment and disaster supplies that will be used during the session. Once training is complete, the participants are invited to become a member of the local CERT.

CERT trained graduates receive recognition for completing their training. Those who choose to become a member of their local CERT, after a 6 month grace period as an active member, will be assigned equipment that will be used for response. If there is a response before the grace period is up the CERT will have equipment to loan the new member. Once a member of the team, they will then receive two (2) photo IDs from the state to use during a response (one to be worn on a lanyard around the member's neck, and one to be provided to Incident Command).

Keep in mind CERT volunteers **do not:** suppress large fires, enter structures that they consider heavily damaged and dangerous, 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 by proper authority, or perform law enforcement functions.

CERT PROGRAM DIRECTOR RESPONSIBILITIES

CERT Program Directors are appointed annually by the local Citizen Corps Council via the LEPCs and will serve as such until their established protocols indicate a timeline or they resign from the position.

The CERT Program Director will:

- ⇒ Develop a leadership contingent as defined in the local by-laws to include but not limited to:
 - East / West or North / South team leaders, if geographic area supports this
 - Supply Officer
 - Training Officer
 - Scribe
 - Others as needed
- ⇒ Develop a meeting schedule for the team; send to the state Citizen Corps Program Coordinator at VEM
- ⇒ Conduct meetings; workshops or training should be included as part of the meetings
- ⇒ Assure meeting minutes and participant rosters are sent to the state Citizen Corps Program Coordinator within two weeks of the meeting date
- ⇒ Conduct new membership interview with identified leadership
- ⇒ Assure all member information is sent to state Citizen Corps Coordinator for input into state system
 - Membership information for each team member to include:
 - Completed Volunteer Information Form (*updated February 2009*)
 - Current head shot photo accepted in jpeg format ONLY compile photos on CD
 - Membership form should be returned to the CERT program director for input into the Vermont Emergency Response Volunteer (VERV) network
 - Photos should be emailed or mailed to the state Citizen Corps Coordinator

MEETINGS / MAINTAINING INVOLVEMENT

Once initial training has been completed, participants will choose to be a member of their local CERT or use their skills to prepare their families and themselves for an event that may affect them. Those who become a member of a CERT will attend monthly or bi-monthly meetings. These meetings will be used to provide refresher training and add-on training in a variety of subject areas. This will allow for development of CERT team members in various areas of expertise.

CERT's will also be a part of community education that will include sponsoring or participating in events that will support community education in Preparedness.

BEYOND DISASTER RESPONSE

Roles and Responsibilities of CERT Volunteers:

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 communications or transportation difficulties – “Neighbor Helping Neighbor”. As the CERT concept has taken hold across the country, CERTs have become much more than originally envisioned. CERTs have proven themselves to be an active and vital part of their communities’ **preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation capability**.

Each team works with their LEPCs and response agencies to determine what activates they will work on. For example, CERTs have been used to:

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

ACTIVATION AND DEPLOYMENT OF CERT

Vermont Emergency Management has developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to include standard team bylaws, activation protocols, codes of conduct and appropriate contact information. CERTs are required to follow these protocols in order to be covered under Vermont’s Liability Coverage during any emergency or non-emergency activation (to include monthly meetings and trainings as well). The response role of the CERT is the responsibility of local first responder and state requests. The final approval for response in order to activate the Liability Coverage will come through calling the VEM Duty Officer at 1(800)-347-0488.

For non-emergency CERT response or assistance, VEM should be notified 48 hours before the event. CERT trained volunteers operating alone are considered “Good Samaritans” and are covered under this Volunteer Protection Act. A CERT volunteer acting on their own does not have any authority beyond serving as a “Good Samaritan” and should not represent themselves as CERT or wear or use CERT equipment.

When deployed by proper authority, CERT’s can compliment and enhance response capability in neighborhoods and workplaces.

CERTs are not intended to replace a community’s response capability, but rather, to serve as an important supplement to it. CERT’s must keep their own safety in mind as their first priority. CERT’s must know their capabilities and the limitations of their training and equipment and work within those limitations.

PROTOCOL FOR ACTIVATION OF VERMONT CERTs

- A. Any **Incident Commander of a First Responder Organization** (*Law Enforcement, Fire, Rescue or American Red Cross all acceptable*), or **Local Emergency Management Director** (*who must be a recognized agent of a town*) within Vermont may request permission to activate an established and registered Citizen Corps Program Team via Vermont Emergency Management to the level of its training
- B. Before team activation and response, the following communication will be needed with the State:
- a. Emergency Activation
- § Contact the Vermont Emergency Management (VEM) Duty Officer before activating at: 1(800) 347-0488 and provide:
- Incident Command information (including name of agency requesting assistance, contact name[s] and phone number[s])
 - Team assignment information
 - **Volunteers are not covered under Vermont Statute Title 20 if this call is not made**
- § When requested to activate a Citizen Corps Program Team, a member from VEM (or if after hours, the duty officer) will:
- Using the Contact List provided by each Team Director, call the team to activate; and
 - Provide the Primary Team Point of Contact with the following information:
 - Location of response
 - Level of training needed for response
 - VEM contact person to call back once team is assembled
 - Timeline needed to activate a team in order to respond to the request
 - Incident Command contact person and number from local First Responder Agency or Local Emergency Management office requesting assistance at the event site
- § Initiate your team callouts & provide team assignments
- b. Non-Emergency Activation – Events Overseen by a First Responder Agency or Local Emergency Management Director
- § **ONLY** a First Responder Agency or Local Emergency Management Director can request this type of activation (State Departments and Agencies can **not** formally request this type of activation)
- § The Citizen Corps Program Team Leader must forward an email notification from the First Responder Agency or Local Emergency Management office requesting assistance **no later than 48 hours prior to the activation** to the VEM Duty Officer, accompanied by the following

information:

- Municipal organization requesting activation (Command & Control entity)
- Event request date, time, duration & location
- Who will be responding (if this information is not yet determined, send when available)
- Any other information you feel is important to the activation
- **Ensure a confirming email reply is received from VEM formally activating your team prior to formal activation of team members**

- **Volunteers are not covered under Vermont Statute Title 20 if this email is not received and confirmed**

§ Initiate your team callouts & provide team assignments

c. Promotional or Training Activities and Monthly Meetings

§ These types of team activities do not require a formal activation; however, the Team Director should send the VEM Citizen Corps Program Coordinator a confirming email with the date, time and description of the activity **and** should receive a confirming email from VEM acknowledging the occurrence of the activity

- **Volunteers are not covered under Vermont Statute Title 20 if this email is not received and confirmed**

C. Point of Contact will be (*per Vermont Citizen Corps Program Bylaws for Operation*):

- a. Team Director
- b. Team Training Coordinator
- c. Team Outreach Coordinator

D. Information needed for all Team Assignments:

- a. Determine what is needed for Team Assignment and if the team is qualified
- b. Determine how many people are needed
- c. Determine the location of the staging area or other location that Team should report to
- d. Determine who the team will report to (*1st Responder Agency or Local Emergency Management Incident Commander*)
- e. Call back number and contact name of requesting entity if more information is needed

E. Call out will be by telephone with callouts proceeding until all applicable contacts on the list until have been reached and the goals of the activation are achieved

Pertinent Rules to Follow (if your team is activated):

- a. Teams will not self-activate at any time
- b. The activated Team will consist of the appropriate number of members trained to the level of their activation

- c. The first Team Member to arrive at the Incident Location will be responsible for recording the names and times of arrival of his/her Team members until the designated Team Leader is established
- d. Once the Team has assembled, the designated Team Leader will report to the On-Scene Incident Commander to receive an assignment and be the Point of Contact to the On-Scene Incident Commander
- e. A representative from the local First Responder Agency (Incident Commander) or Local Emergency Management Director must be ***physically present*** (visually and / or within radio contact **on the ground** at the incident site) at all emergency and / or non-emergency sites during a Citizen Corps Program activation to provide a Command and Control Structure
- f. Team Leaders are responsible for the mission and safety of their units, and will assign roles and record these assignments, receive a designation to the unit for use in the Incident Command System and record all appropriate information needed (or designate appropriate personnel to do so)
- g. Team Members will report to their Team Leader any problems or decisions that cannot be made in the field to which they are assigned
- h. On completion of initial assignment, the team will report to the Incident Staging Area for further assignment or release
- i. Upon demobilization of assignment(s), each Team Leader will account for all other Team Members and collect all documentation
- j. All teams will debrief as a complete unit before release
- k. After activation and response are complete, the Team Leader should complete an Incident Response / After Action report, then email this to the VEM Duty Officer, with a copy to the VEM Citizen Corps Program Coordinator, Local Citizen Corps Council Chair and the team members who responded during the activation.

All CERT's responding to emergency and non-emergency events must wear their CERT identifying gear that may include:

- a. CERT shirt
- b. Black or khaki slacks (jeans may be worn if appropriate to the event)
- c. Appropriate sturdy shoes
- d. CERT vest
- e. All weather gear if needed
- f. Any other equipment packs as needed and directed by CERT leadership
- g. NO other combination of other volunteer organizations or for profit organizations gear or clothing may be worn