



Lowell CERT

Community Emergency Response Teams



November 2003

When Disaster Strikes

The damage caused by natural disasters and man-made events such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, and terrorism can affect all elements of society and government. These events:

- Severely restrict or overwhelm our response resources, communications, transportation, and utilities.
- Leave many individuals and neighborhoods cut off from outside support.

It takes time for emergency response agencies to set up and prepare for an organized response, and damaged roads and disrupted communications systems may restrict their access into critically affected areas. Thus, for the initial period immediately following a disaster—often up to 3 days or longer—individuals, households, and neighborhoods may need to rely on their own resources for: food, water, first aid, and shelter. Individual preparedness, planning, survival skills, and mutual aid within neighborhoods and worksites during this initial period are essential measures in coping with the aftermath of a disaster.

Community-based preparedness planning allows us 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.

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 Community Emergency Response Team (**CERT**) program is designed to help communities prepare for effective disaster response through training and planning.

As each **CERT** is organized and trained, its members select a team leader. Teams are encouraged to go into action even during relatively moderate emergencies, to gain practice mobilizing and assessing damage.

The **CERT** program can provide an effective first-response capability. Acting as individuals first, then as members of teams, trained **CERT** volunteers can fan out within their assigned areas, extinguishing small fires, turning off natural gas inlets to damaged homes, performing light search and rescue, and rendering basic medical treatment.

Classes are taught by trained emergency personnel, including firefighters, police, hospitals, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS). The program consists of 8 training sessions and emphasizes hands-on practice.

I would appreciate the opportunity to present more information to your neighborhood / organization at your next meeting. For more information and/or to discuss a possible date for a presentation, contact me at 978-459-5552.

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