



Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

Community Emergency Response Team training bridges the critical gap between the time of disaster and the arrival of emergency services. Trained volunteers with basic emergency training enhances the capacity of civil society providing disaster assistance immediately following an event. Disasters come without warning so preparedness along with a little basic emergency training will save lives and protect property. CERT is a grassroots, all-hazard training program designed to prepare individuals and communities to respond effectively to disasters when professional help may not be immediately available. Neighbours helping Neighbours.

We are living in unprecedented times with forces of every imaginable disaster, including both natural and human-made, including terrorist attacks. It is not business as usual folks, where we can expect a major event every hundred years! Devastating catastrophic disasters are happening with greater frequency, severity, and impact on communities. It is time to 'bridge the gap' between the disaster research and practice; developing safer and more resilient places to live.

There has been so much focus on what is causing an increase in global disasters, but are we putting as much emphasis on how to deal with the effects of the changing extreme weather patterns? Changing climate patterns are being felt around the world, so the predicted is now becoming the predictable. Communities are facing new challenges and experiencing more intense impacts from once familiar hazards. Is a do-it-yourself approach to planning, which has been the norm for emergency management, still the most effective methodology for building disaster-resilient communities? Can one organization/agency manage the complex events that have become more frequent? While government agencies do their best during emergencies and disasters, they too may be confronted by the consequences limiting their resources and man-power.

A 'whole-community' philosophy in its catastrophic preparedness planning, shifts from a 'government-centric' response to an approach which considers trained community volunteers as collaborators and partners, as assets rather than liabilities. An effective community-wide emergency response must begin with community-wide planning and preparation through multi-sector collaboration. That partnership results when government, not-for-profit, private, and public organizations, community groups, and individual community members come together to solve problems that impact the whole community. As community builders, more can be accomplished, working together to lay the groundwork for a stronger and more resilient community, that has the capacity to bounce-back with greater speed when incidents occur; then working in isolated silos.

Community residents are often the first on the scene which makes them the first responder. They are in greater proximity to those in need (especially true in a rural setting) and often react quicker than formal organizations. It is important to fully appreciate the value of a community response. Practiced community engagement assist in creating a more resilient community; shifting response from improvisation to coordination, resulting in communities being empowered to take shared responsibility when disaster strikes.

ANSWERS TO COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING CERT TRAINING

1. Who developed CERT and where did this training originate?

CERT was developed by the Los Angeles Fire Department in 1985, after studying the civilian response to disasters in Mexico and Japan. The program expanded nationwide in 1994, thanks to FEMA, and has since been adopted globally.

2. How did Bridges of Love become involved in emergency training?

Marg Pollon, founding director of Bridges of Love Ministry, took CERT training in 2012 under the Calgary Emergency Management Agency (CEMA). After adapting the training materials for Canadian use, with review by AEMA and Public Safety Canada, CERT Canada was tested and launched in 2014.

3. What is Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training?

CERT provides volunteers with practical skills and resources for responding to disasters. Volunteers learn from professional instructors, basic medical information and skills, fire safety, search and rescue, psychology of trauma, and disaster management techniques. These skills and knowledge enable CERT grads to assist their communities until the first responders arrive on the scene.

4. Is CERT training like the Red Cross First Aid, CPR, or St. John's Ambulance training?

The similarity is found in the word "training". CERT is all-hazard training so covers a response for any disaster that might happen in a locality. CERT offers Medical Disaster Operations modules 1 & 2 that cover very basic medical information and skills that can save lives. It is not intended as an in-depth study but offers assistance for neighbours helping neighbours, doing the greatest good for the greatest number. We recommend if a CERT wishes to have additional more in-depth training, these additional options are pursued.

5. Can anyone take the CERT Training?

Anyone aged 18 or older can participate in CERT training. It is open to all individuals who desire to be better prepared to contribute to community disaster preparedness.

6. Does CERT provide spiritual or religious instruction during the training?

Bridges of Love is a faith-based ministry, which gives a Christian foundation and perspective for their programs. CERT training, however, follows the CERT US training which is secular in its approach.

7. What is the difference between an ‘emergency’ and a ‘disaster’?

Emergencies can typically be handled by local resources and emergency services. Disasters, on the other hand, overwhelm local resources and require a larger-scale response.

8. Do CERTs respond to any emergency?

During an initial response to an emergency, most regions have sufficient resources and emergency responders that can respond to emergencies. If a CERT arrives on the scene before the first responders arrive, however, their responsibility is to call 911 if not already contacted, assess the situation and if able to assist to a small fire before it gets out of hand, or save a life by following our basic medical or search and rescue protocol, then CERTs can proceed. CERT training is intended for major events where the systems are overwhelmed. We do not recommend, however, standing by and allowing someone to die, or watch property get destroyed; if there is something that CERTs can do within the training before professionals arrive.

9. Is there risk involved being a CERT volunteer?

While risk is a concern in volunteer emergency activities, CERT training provides essential knowledge and skills that help reduce risks and ensure safety during response efforts. The greater risk, as emphasized by insurance experts, is doing nothing in the face of a catastrophic event!

10. Do CERTs need to wait to be called by the First Responders?

CERTs provide an effective first-response capability. Acting as individuals first, then as team members, trained CERT volunteers can fan-out within their assigned areas, extinguish small fires, turn off natural gas at damaged home, perform light search and rescue, and render basic medical treatment and triage. CERTs act as effective “eyes and ears” for uniformed emergency responders. Trained volunteers can offer an important potential workforce to service organizations in non-hazardous support functions.

11. Do CERT volunteers replace professionally trained emergency personnel?

If available, emergency services personnel are the best trained and equipped to handle an event. Following a catastrophic disaster, however, communities may be isolated for an extended period, for a myriad of reasons, including the size of the affected area, inoperable communication systems, or unpassable roads so community residents may need to be able to look after themselves for an extended period. After a large-scale disaster, local governments may not have the capacity to manage the over-whelming needs of an entire community.

12. Does CERT training duplicate other training offered by Municipalities, Province or Private Agencies?

When CERT was first introduced in Alberta, there was little knowledge of this training in Canada. We believe other agencies are now introducing CERT in other Provinces, so acceptance is coming.

13. How many days are included in the CERT training?

Each module is 1.5 hr. in length. The course is conducted over two full days (four modules for each day). Included is a Friday evening dessert session where a Key-note Speaker shares a special topic. This basic training is only a beginning, however, as we encourage participants to continue learning and expanding their knowledge and expertise as part of their neighbourhood CERT team.

14. What is the topic for the Friday Key-note Speaker?

The Friday evening session topic varies with each Summit. Alberta Hazard material is included with the CERT materials so in past Summits, this has been a topic for the Friday evening session (Environment Canada). Other topics that have been included in past CERT Canada Summits included: Pandemic Preparedness, Hail Storms, Volunteerism and Liability, Tornadoes, Disaster Financial Preparedness, and Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP).

15. What other resources are included in the training?

Each student is given a binder which includes the course PowerPoints, access to the Student Manuals (on-line), and other relevant documents, a CERT Certificate, a numbered Photo ID Card, a CERT T-Shirt, CERT Cap, CERT Kit, Friday evening dessert, lunches and snacks/drinks.

16. What is the cost to take the training?

\$199 per participant

\$149 for students and those auditing the course

Group discounts for 5 or more

17. Who instructs the various modules?

Professionals in various fields instruct each module. They have experience, credentials, and stories to tell. Instructors are encouraged to take Bridges of Love's CERT Train-the-Trainer course.

18. What does CERT Train-the-Trainer include?

About half of the lessons focus on training and skills and half of the lessons focus on review of the CERT Basic Training course. Instructors do not need to take CERT T-T-T but this one-day course is recommended and offered free of charge.

19. How are CERTs activated in time of disaster?

When a disaster strikes, CERTs priority is themselves and family needs. Once secured, CERT team members gather at a designated safe meeting place to assist the community until the First Responders take over the duties.

20. What do CERTs do after the Professionals arrive on the scene?

The Team Leader turns all the documentation over to the professionals and share any other information that will help with their efforts. The CERTs meet for debriefing.

21. Are CERTs covered with Liability Insurance?

Volunteers in general are covered under Alberta's Emergency Medical Aid Act as long as they strictly adhere to the scope of their training.

For more information or to become involved, please contact Marg or Felicia at admin@bridgesoflove.net. Together, we can strengthen our community's preparedness and response by bridging the critical gap ~ Neighbours helping Neighbours! www.bridgesoflove.net/cert

WWW.BRIDGESOFLOVE.NET

