

# *Community Emergency Response Team Program*

*Escambia County, Florida*



## **Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) In-Depth**

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program is an official emergency preparedness program of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The CERT concept was originally developed and implemented by the Los Angeles Fire Department in 1985. The need was recognized following a series of earthquakes in both the U.S. and Mexico that left hundreds dead, injured, and without emergency services. By 1993, thousands of residents had been trained in the Southern California area and today; programs are underway throughout the United States and Canada. The CERT program nationwide is supported and assisted by FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI) in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

The CERT course benefits anyone who takes it. Graduates are better prepared to respond to and cope with the aftermath of natural or manmade disasters. Neighborhood groups receiving CERT training become closer-knit and develop plans to help each other when disaster strikes. CERT training provides a person with information and experience that is unavailable anywhere else in most communities. Topics such as introduction to disasters, disaster medical care, fire suppression, search & rescue, and disaster planning have been shown to be highly beneficial to all who attend.

The United States Government publishes the Federal Response Plan (FRP) as its official plan of action in response to disasters. Under the FRP each specialty area such as fire, police, communications, animal control, public works, and urban search and rescue that may require emergency support is assigned an Emergency Support Function (ESF) number. Functions (ESFs). For example, Urban Search & Rescue is designated ESF-9.

In support of the Federal Response Plan, the State of Florida published a Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) that details the State of Florida's response to disasters. Similarly, Escambia County published the Escambia County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan. This type of planning results in uniform terminology and consistency from the federal government down to the local level.

In Escambia County, the CERT teams are designed to be coordinated at the neighborhood level by a designated CERT leader. This team leader should be selected by the members of the team and is the official liaison between the neighborhood CERT and Escambia County Department of Public Safety. The point of contact may be the fire department, Sheriff's Office or other department as required at the time.

***CERT***

If the CERT does not exist in a neighborhood, CERT graduates wishing to maintain their involvement are encouraged to participate as part of the nearest established team until such time as a new team is formed in their immediate area. When a new CERT is eventually formed in this neighborhood, these graduates can provide crucial support and direction to its development.

Community Emergency Response Team courses will be offered to the citizens of the county at no cost as a cooperative effort between the Escambia County Department of Public Safety and the Escambia County Sheriff's Office, and local municipalities.

During the CERT training itself and thereafter (when, on a self-initiated basis, putting the training into proactive status during an emergency), participants are deemed "volunteers" and not employees or agents of Escambia County or any municipal authority.

As such, volunteers are not entitled to any privileges, immunities, or insurance coverage afforded employees of the county or local municipalities. That is to say, volunteers are not covered under the city's or county's Workman's Compensation, Unemployment Compensation, liability coverage, or hospital/medical plans.

Volunteers, however, have certain immunity from civil liability under the Florida Good Samaritan Act (FL. Statue 768.13) if they gratuitously and in good faith render emergency care or treatment.

Further, if such volunteers are "called out" by the county or municipality and requested to provide emergency services, then such volunteers are additionally protected against civil liability under the Florida Volunteer Protection Act (FL Statue 768.1355) if they are acting within the scope of official duties during such volunteer service.

#### **CERT members entering restricted areas**

Current CERT personnel may be authorized to enter into restricted areas during a disaster upon presenting their Escambia County CERT identification card. Entry into such an area will be for official reasons and will be with the approval of the On Scene Commander. A CERT identification card is not intended to be used as an automatic pass to enter into restricted zones if there are not requirements indicated for the service of CERT's.

# *The Florida Good Samaritan Act (FL.768.13)*

# *Florida Volunteer Protection Act (FL. 768.1355)*



If you take care of your equipment, your equipment will take care of you.



Responsibility

SELF

FAMILY

COMMUNITY

**COMMUNITY  
EMERGENCY  
RESPONSE TEAM  
(CERT) COURSE**

*CERT Course Curriculum*

*Week 1 - CERT Introduction & Disaster Preparedness*

*Week 2 - Disaster Fire Suppression*

*Week 3 - Disaster Medical Part I*

*Week 4 - Disaster Medical Part II*

*Week 5 - Light Limited Search and Rescue*

*Week 6 - Disaster Psychology and Team Organization*

*Week 7 - Pre and Post Storm Operations*

*(Each Class Averages 3 1/2 Hours)*

**CERT Equipment**

*While specialized rescue equipment is not issued by Escambia County to CERT members, the following is a list of basic equipment recommended for on-scene operations:*

- *Safety Helmet OSHA approved*
- *Safety work gloves*
- *Reflective Vest*
- *Safety Glasses*
- *Safety Shoes*
- *CERT Identification Card*
- *Flashlights*

**Never  
exceed  
your level  
of  
training**



# Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Rules and Regulations

1. **You are not a Sheriff's Deputy or Fire Fighter.**

*You are trained to function as an extension of the fire department's response to catastrophic disasters when such circumstances exist or when directed by emergency services officials.*

2. **You are forbidden to carry guns, knives, sticks or other weapons.**

*You have been trained for immediate disaster response and there is no need, place or legal authorization for you to carry or use any of the above. To do so will jeopardize your own safety and the continued existence of the CERT program in Escambia County.*

3. **Your first responsibility is to yourself and your family.**

*When disaster occurs your first responsibility is to ensure you own safety and the safety of your family. You should not venture out on your own to start search & rescue operations without your team members.*

4. **Contact your CERT Leader.**

*If disaster occurs such as a hurricane, tornado, plane crash, etc. After ensuring that you and your family are safe, you should assemble with your CERT leader and group for additional instruction and directions. Your CERT leader is your point of contact for the Fire and Sheriff Departments. Do not attempt to contact the Fire Department or Sheriff's Office directly unless it is a life-threatening emergency.*

5. **If you cannot reach your CERT Leader**

*due to phone lines down, power off, etc., respond to your pre-designated rally point for your neighborhood CERT. Do this only when you are sure it is safe to do so. Do not leave a place of safety during a storm.*

6. **Bring all of your recommended safety gear and badge.**

*When functioning as a member of the Escambia County CERT team, you should always have your issued CERT badge with you and display it on the outside of your clothing. Furthermore, wearing recommended safety gear would insure your basic safety requirements are met.*

7. **Stay within the scope of your training.**

*You have been trained under the curriculum of FEMA's Community Emergency Response Team program. Please confine your actions to those guidelines and stay within the scope of your training and certification.*

8. **Stay within your limitations.**

*You must confine your actions to your physical and resource limitations when responding as a member of a CERT. Such limitations may be determined by, but not limited to, equipment available, physical abilities, knowledge, authority, hazards, etc.*



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