

Organizing a CERT

Organizing a CERT team it is actually quite easy. First, you need to remember these are pre-disaster positions and functions. If a disaster strikes, follow the Incident Command System (ICS) which says the first person on the scene is the incident commander (or team leader) until relieved by someone more qualified or the pre-disaster team leader arrives.

The team should meet together, as a whole, and elect team officers. Remember, these people need not be technically qualified (i.e.; don't need certificates of training). Rather, team officers should be the team members who are willing and capable of making decisions that will benefit the team (both pre and post disaster) and can dedicate the time necessary to administer the team's pre-disaster activities (i.e.; fund raising, training sessions, etc.).

There are five positions that should be filled for each new team in order for the team to be considered active or functional. These are: team leader, logistics officer (assistant team leader), medical operations officer, search and rescue officer and fire suppression officer. Notice that these titles are the same as the team sub-sections given in the CERT training manual. You should also elect a communications officer and other positions (i.e.; media relations or historian) your team feels are needed if you have a sufficient number of personnel on your team.

In every disaster, untrained volunteers always show up asking what they can do to help. Each team officer can, in just a few short minutes, teach these volunteers to do specific jobs for the team during a response. Your team of five officers can grow quickly to a team of 30 or more if you make effective use of these untrained volunteers.

It is best to keep teams small (10 - 30 people), and have more of them, than to have one large team spread over an area too large to manage. The team's boundaries or service area should be defined or mapped. Typically, service area boundaries follow religious boundaries (such as parishes, wards and so forth), school district boundaries, electoral or voting precincts, or grid boundaries defined by local emergency managers.

The "pre-disaster" team leader duties are:

1. keep rosters and training records of the CERT members within his/her team;
2. develop a written response plan for team operations for the types of disasters your team is likely to encounter;
3. seek advanced training and schedule periodic table-top or small scale drill meetings to hone the team member skills;
4. develop and maintain a cache of supplies and equipment needed to implement your response plan, and insure that they are kept current and weatherproof;
5. schedule regular meetings with CERT members to keep "in-touch" and address any issues that face the team as a whole;
6. encourage team members to keep current on disaster preparedness skills;
7. with the help of team members, take pre-disaster surveys to seek out post-disaster resources, personnel, tools, and equipment;
8. develop and maintain a neighborhood map indicating CERT members, block captains, possible hazards, physically impaired persons, active wells, staging areas/EOC's, and cache(s);
9. be friendly and include all team members no matter religion, race, creed, etc.

The team leader duties during "response" are:

1. Implement the team response plan upon arrival at the EOC - emergency operations center;
2. perform preliminary damage assessments;
3. list all team members and volunteers including duty assignments, shift schedules and current location;
4. receive and evaluate all incoming field reports and data;
5. list all available resources, begin a status board, establish communications with local EOC(s);
6. assign personnel based on abilities or limitations and assign SAR, Fire, Medical and Logistics teams to specific jobs based on evaluation of available information;
7. Insure sufficient food, water, shelter and rest for each team member or volunteer.

The "pre-disaster" logistics officer (assistant team leader) duties are:

1. assist the team leader in developing the team response plan;
2. develop lists of supplies and equipment needed to implement the response plan;
3. locate a site for the team cache which is reasonably secure, yet accessible, and is away from potential hazards such as flooding streams and the like;
4. develop several donation campaigns aimed at procuring items for the cache;
5. develop and maintain a running inventory of all cache items;
6. develop liaisons with local emergency managers, fire departments or rescue companies.

The logistics officer (assistant team leader) duties during "response" are:

1. open the team cache and set up the staging area;
2. list all team members and volunteers as they arrive at the staging area;
3. establish communications with team members and other EOCs;
4. develop a shift schedule of disaster workers and equipment/supplies resources list;
5. issue supplies and equipment from the team cache, account for all materials issued at all times;
6. arrange for food, water and shelter for all team members, volunteers and displaced people in the service area.

The "pre-disaster" medical officer duties are:

1. assist the team leader and logistics officer in team response plan development including lists of necessary supplies and equipment;
2. develop or obtain documentation forms (i.e; triage tags, patient assessments, in/out logs, etc.);
3. identify training needs of medical staff and arrange special training sessions as needed;
4. locate sites for use as treatment areas and morgues;
5. help obtain medical and morgue equipment and supplies for team cache.

The medical officer duties during "response" are:

1. setup triage, treatment and morgue areas;
2. obtain medical supplies and equipment from the logistics officer;
3. assign triage, treatment and transportation teams and issue needed supplies, equipment and documentation;
4. insure each team member or volunteer follows current accepted medical treatment protocols.

The "pre-disaster" search and rescue officer duties are:

1. assist the team leader and logistics officer in team response plan development including lists of necessary supplies and equipment, and evacuation plans for the neighborhood;
2. develop or obtain documentation forms (i.e; triage tags, damage assessments, maps, etc.);
3. identify training needs of SAR staff and arrange special training sessions as needed;
4. locate sites having special hazards and collect and map data on team maps;
5. perform neighborhood surveys to locate neighbors with special needs, etc., also map this data.

The search and rescue officer duties during a "response" are:

1. setup search grids and prioritize search areas;
2. obtain medical and SAR supplies and equipment from the logistics officer;
3. assign triage, search and safety teams and issue needed supplies, equipment and documentation;
4. insure each team member or volunteer follows current accepted safety protocols.

The "pre-disaster" fire suppression officer duties are:

1. assist the team leader and logistics officer in team response plan development including lists of necessary supplies and fire fighting equipment;
2. develop or obtain documentation forms (i.e; damage assessments, maps, etc.);
3. identify training needs of fire suppression staff and arrange special training sessions as needed;
4. locate sites having special fire or hazardous materials, collect and map data on team maps.

The fire suppression officer duties during a "response" are:

1. setup search grids and prioritize fire suppression activities;
2. obtain fire extinguishers and fire fighting equipment from the logistics officer;
3. assign fire suppression teams and issue needed supplies, equipment and documentation;
4. insure each team member or volunteer follows current accepted safety protocols.