PS COMMITTEE #1
March 13, 2014
Update

MEMORANDUM

March 11, 2014

TO: Public Safety Committee

FROM: Essie McGuire, Senior Legislative Analyst

SUBJECT: **Update – Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)**

Today the Public Safety Committee will receive an update briefing on the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). The following individuals will participate in this discussion:

- Division Chief Alan Hinde, Division of Volunteer Services, MCFRS
- Greg St. James, CERT Program Manager, MCFRS
- Chris Voss, Director, Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security

Volunteer members of the CERT Team may also be present for this discussion.

In December 2013 the CERT Team celebrated 10 years of active service in Montgomery County. The purpose of the CERT Team is to educate people about disaster preparedness, and train them in basic disaster response skills to assist family and community during a crisis. CERT Teams are a nationally recognized model of expanding emergency response capacity in the community, and the CERT Program is under the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) at the Federal level.

The CERT Team is housed in the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS) and has one program manager and a small amount of grant and County funding. CERT members are required to take 30 hours of instruction and hands on training over a five week period, and additional ongoing training is offered as well.

The Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (OEMHS) works with MCFRS to coordinate the efforts of the CERT Team in an emergency along with other community volunteer efforts. OEMHS reviews requests for additional support during events and then identifies which community volunteer team can best meet that need.

MCFRS has prepared the overview presentation on the CERT Team membership, training, and current efforts on circles 1-11. OEMHS has prepared a presentation on coordinating volunteer organizations in the County on circles 12-16. Information is attached from the Montgomery County CERT website (circles 17-19) and the FEMA website (circles 20-24). The Committee may also want to ask participants to comment on the following during the update discussion:

- Has the County considered any alternative or abbreviated training opportunities for individuals who may be interested in participating but cannot commit to the full training time period?

- OEMHS discusses (circle 15) efforts to expand the range of community groups involved in emergency response. In addition to expanding the number of groups involved, what efforts are in place to ensure that the capability of these groups is maximized in any kind of event? What opportunities are there for community involvement outside of a major emergency event?

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Montgomery County CERT

Dedicated to improving the resilience of Montgomery County

Community Emergency Response Team

- **CERT:** *The "T" stands for both team and training.*

- CERT has a dual mission to educate and prepare residents for emergencies, and to provide a 'second responder' team to assist in large scale events or incidents.

CERT Membership

- 435 Trained CERTs in our data base since 2010.
- 30-50 ready on short notice.
- Over 1,000 trained since 2003

CERT Budget and Staffing

- One full time MCFRS Program Manager
- Grant funding via OEMHS FY14 28K
- MCFRS DVS FY14 3K

CERT Mobilization

- Request made via MCFRS by any agency.
- CERT reports to Incident Command
- CERT integrated into Incident Management Plan

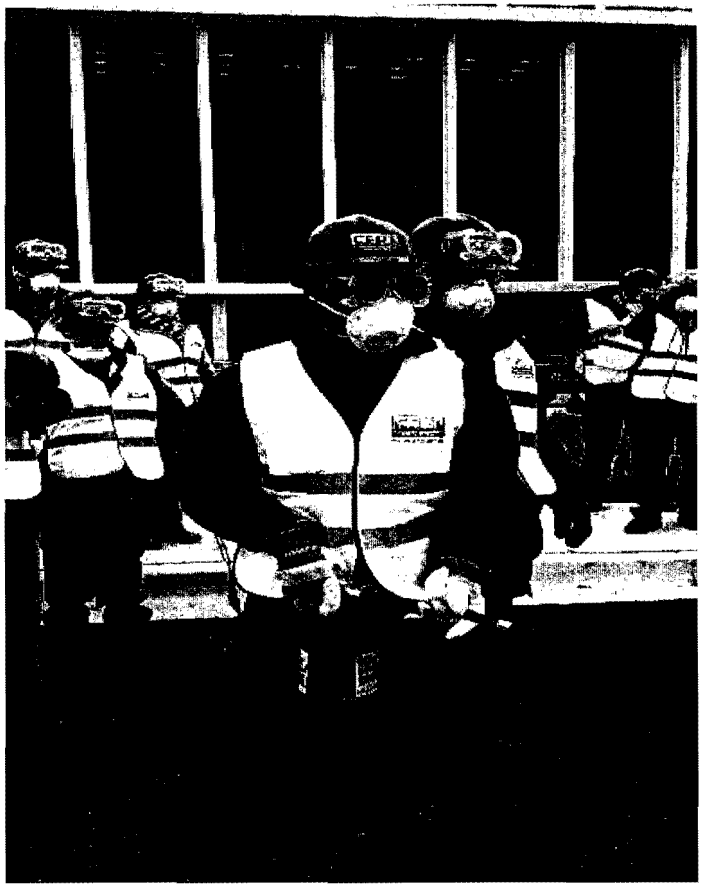
CERT Training

- Quarterly CERT basic class is a 32 Hours FEMA certified curriculum.

- Subjects include:
- Incident Management
- Disaster Preparedness
- Medical Operations
- CPR/AED
- Fire Safety
- Search and Rescue

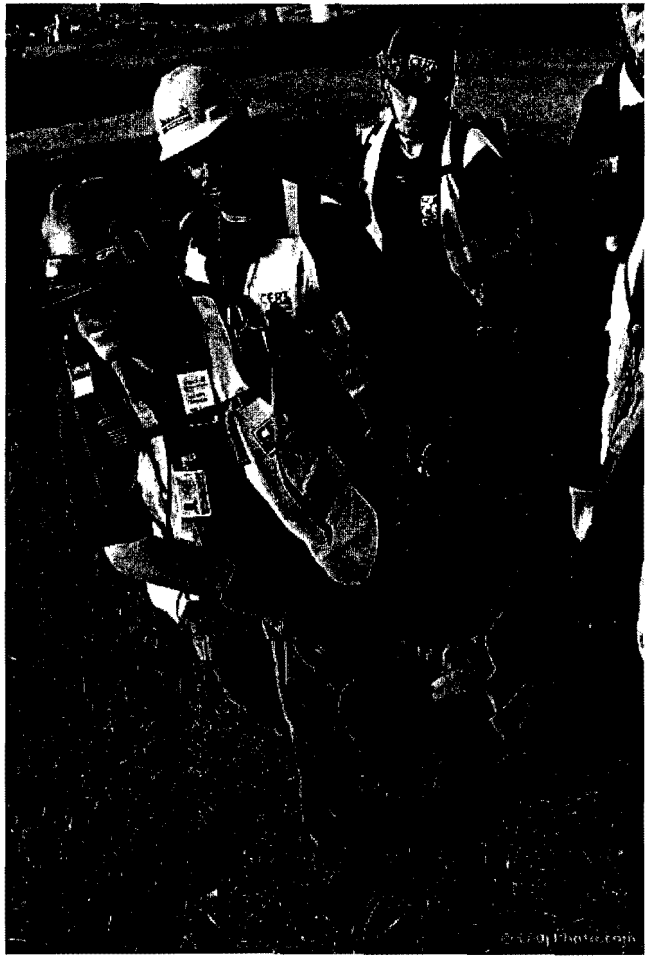
CERT Quarterly Basic Training

- Is conducted by CERT volunteer FEMA certified instructors.
- Is held at the PSHQ.
- Is free to county residents.



Ongoing **CERT** Training

- Monthly training from outside agencies:
- Police
- OEMHS
- Public Utilities
- FEMA
- Annual large scale training:
- Cap Shield
- CERT CON



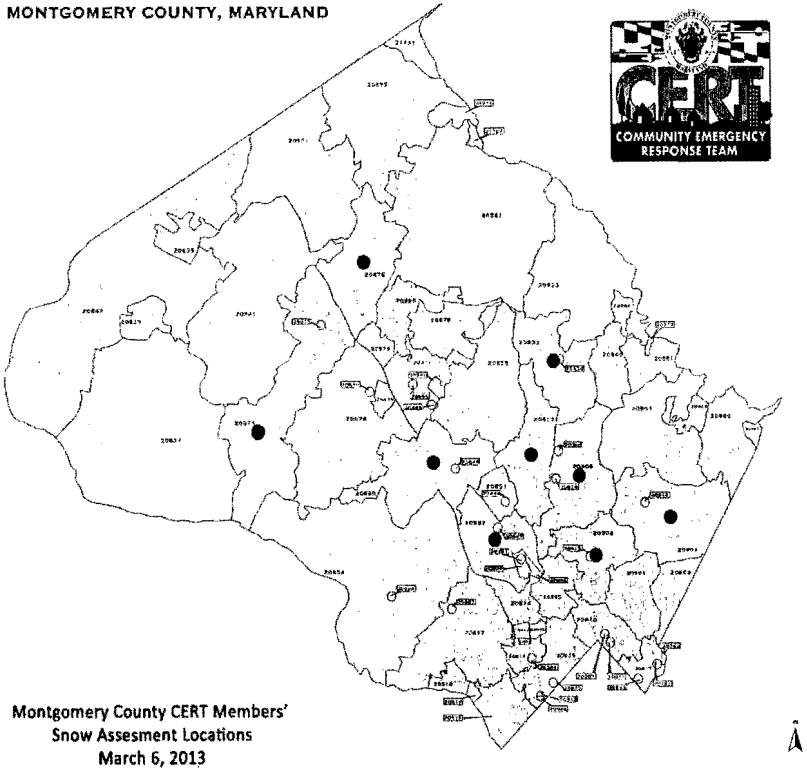
In 2014 **CERT** expands outreach:

- **Storm Camp**
- 4 hour interactive educational event for adults and children offered to community groups.

MC CERT has trained two sister teams in Haiti

In 2014 **CERT** expands role:

- **VERT**
- Virtual Emergency Response Team
- CERT members provide situation reports to EOC during weather events.
- In 2013 MC CERT won FEMA recognition for piloting this concept.



Volunteer Organizations and Emergency Management

Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security
Presentation to the
Montgomery County Council Public Safety Committee
December 9, 2013

The Process of Integrating Volunteer Organizations in Emergency Response

Following a disaster when the Emergency Operations Center is activated, responders make requests for additional resources to the EOC (*Example* – Request for additional shelter staff).

OEMHS reviews the requests and determines which potential resources are the most appropriate given the situation (*Example* – County staff, volunteers, etc.).

OEMHS processes the request and tasks the county department or organization managing the resource to fulfill the request (*Example* – Fire and Rescue to call up CERT volunteers).

Emergency Preparedness and Response Volunteer Organizations

1. **Community Emergency Response Team**
2. **County Animal Response Team** – Under the Police Department, CART provides volunteers that assist in pet shelters.
3. **American Red Cross** – Manages county shelters.
4. **Amateur Radio / RACES** – Amateur radio volunteers provide alternate communication support to the Emergency Operations Center.
5. **Civil Air Patrol** – Search and rescue and disaster relief.
6. **Maryland Professional Volunteer Corps** – State medical volunteers working with DHHS-Public Health in support of a public health disaster response.

Expanding Opportunities for Volunteer Organizations in Emergency Response

OEMHS is working with volunteer organizations to expand participation in emergency preparedness and response. Groups include:

•Boy Scouts – Educating scouts so they are better prepared to help their families and communities prepare for emergencies.
•Faith-Based Organizations – Working with the Community Engagement Cluster and HHS to better integrate faith-based organizations into mass care.

Any Resident can Make a Difference

1. Make sure your family is prepared for a disaster by assembling kit, making a plan, and signing up for *Alert Montgomery*

2. Know the people in your neighborhood and community who might need extra assistance in an emergency. Help them prepare and check on them following a disaster.

3. Get training through organizations like CERT or Red Cross.

4. Volunteer for one of Montgomery County's emergency response organizations.

Welcome!

Welcome to the Montgomery County, Maryland Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) website. The Montgomery County CERT Program is managed by Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service.

In December 2013 Montgomery County CERT will celebrate ten years of active service to our county. Our membership takes great pride in the work we have done and continue to do, to increase the readiness and resilience of Montgomery County.

Beginning in 2014 Montgomery County CERT will début our new education and outreach program Storm Camp, which is a half day workshop designed to improve the readiness and safety of families. More information will be posted here as dates and locations are announced.

In addition to activations in times of emergency, Montgomery County CERT is actively engaged in the community through many outreach events. Our membership continues to grow and benefit from an outstanding training curriculum.

Interested in Montgomery County CERT Services?
If you are interested in having Montgomery County CERT visit your agency/organization, please send an email to outreach@montgomerycert.org.

Interested in joining Montgomery County CERT?
MCCERT is currently accepting applications for its January/February 2014 CERT Basic Training Class. Please visit the "Join Us" tab for more information.

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Training

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Training Program educates people about disaster preparedness for hazards that may impact their area and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as light search and rescue, disaster medical operations, team organization and fire safety. Using the training learned in the classroom and during exercises, CERT members learn to assist their family, their neighbors and their coworkers following an event when professional responders are not immediately available to help.

Why do we need CERT?

Following a major disaster, the first responders who we have come to rely upon to provide fire and medical services will not be able to meet the entire community's need for these services. Factors such as the number of victims, communication failures, or road blockages can prevent people from receiving emergency services they depend upon. People may have to rely on each other for help, in order to meet their immediate life saving and life sustaining needs.

How Long Does CERT Training Last?

The initial CERT Training generally lasts for five weeks and equals 30 hours of instruction and hands on exercises. A typical schedule would be one weekday evening from 7-9 pm AND four hours on the weekend (for example 9am – 1pm on a Saturday, or 12:30pm – 4:30pm on a Sunday). Each session is unique in scheduling so please confirm the hours and your availability before committing to participate.

The topics currently covered within the 30 hours are: Disaster Preparedness, Damage Assessment, First Aid, CPR /AED, Triage, FRS Radio Use, Fire Safety / Fire Extinguisher Usage, Light Search and Rescue, Hazardous Materials Awareness, Incident Command System (NIMS), Pet Safety, Terrorism Awareness, and Mass Casualty Response. The final class is a practical hand's on culmination of the training you've received.

Who Can Take This Training and What is the Cost?

CERT training is being made available throughout the United States. Montgomery County CERT caters to residents of the county who are at least 18 years of age. Exception can be made for people who work within Montgomery County boundaries. As of this writing, this valuable opportunity is being provided to residents at no cost other than a participant's commitment and desire to learn.

When is The Next CERT Class?

The CERT Leadership and Instructors try to provide three trainings per year when possible. The next class being offered that has openings is scheduled to begin in January 2014. All applicants are requested to make a good

faith effort to attend every class; missed units must be made up before the Official FEMA Certificate of Completion is given.

When Will I Know If I Am Included In The CERT Class?

You will receive an initial acknowledgement that your application was received and will be processed for possible inclusion in the next class. Because applications are often received months in advance and the class is filled on a first come first served basis we do require the applicant to acknowledge and respond to the Invitation Email which will be sent approximately four to five weeks before the start of class. **If the student fails to respond to the email within five days, their application will be moved to an inactive status.** At that time the wait listed applicants will be invited as their applications were received. There are three options for the student's response 1) Yes, I am still committed to attend 2) I cannot attend at this time; please apply my application to the next session or 3) I am no longer interested in CERT training.

All accepted applicants will receive a Confirmation Email with specific details about the class location. At any time a student may contact the registrar at Registrar@montgomerycert.org with questions.

Application to Participate in CERT

Please see the Join Us page.

Getting Started in CERT

You may use this link to access the CERT Training Manual, it is recommended that you print and bring it to class but it is not required. The manual can be saved to an electronic file and read on line.
http://www.citizencorps.gov/cert/downloads/training/participantmanual/PM-Combined.pdf

These two FEMA exams are required for CERT students to complete training and graduate. Go to
http://training.fema.gov/IS/

Exams may be taken anytime prior to the start of class but must be completed by the end of class.

IS -100.b – (ICS 100) Introduction to Incident Command System

IS -700.a National Incident Management System (NIMS), An Introduction

Once you have completed the CERT training you will have the unique opportunity to become part of the actual CERT Team! You will then have access to additional training as a team member.

Please direct any training questions to the CERT Registrar at Registrar@montgomerycert.org or to Greg St. James, CERT Program Manager, at

240-777-2407

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Frequently Asked Questions

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Q: What is CERT?

A: The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program educates people about disaster preparedness for hazards that may impact their area and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. Using the training learned in the classroom and during exercises, CERT members can assist others in their neighborhood or workplace following an event when professional responders are not immediately available to help. CERT members also are encouraged to support emergency response agencies by taking a more active role in emergency preparedness projects in their community. The About CERT section of this site gives you a complete description of CERT.

Q: How does CERT benefit the community?

A: People who go through CERT training have a better understanding of the potential threats to their home, workplace and community and can take the right steps to lessen the effects of these hazards on themselves, their homes or

workplace. If a disaster happens that overwhelms local response capability, CERT members can apply the training learned in the classroom and during exercises to give local support to their family, loved ones, neighbors or associates in their immediate area until help arrives. When help does arrive, CERTs provide useful information to responders and support their efforts, as directed, at the disaster site. CERT members can also assist with non-emergency projects that improve the safety of the community. CERTs have been used to distribute and/or install smoke alarms, replace smoke alarm batteries in the home of elderly, distribute disaster education material, provide services at special events, such as parades, sporting events, concerts and more.

Q: Is there a CERT program near me?

A: Over 1100 communities and growing have listed their program on the CERT web site under the Directory of CERT Programs by State. You can check the State Directory to see if one is in your community. There also is a web site maintained by Los Angeles City CERT volunteers that has a listing of "Other Team Links".

Q: How do we start a CERT program?

A: CERT requires a partnership between community members and local government, emergency management and response agencies. The program does take a commitment of time and resources from all parties. Interested community members should discuss with local government and emergency management officials ways to improve their community's preparedness capability and how they can be involved. The outcome of these discussions can range from education programs to an active training program like CERT that prepares participants to be part of the community's response capability following major disasters. It is also important to develop a plan that covers training, maintenance and activation standards as well as administrative requirements like databases and funding. This plan will act as a guide so that one can evaluate the program and make adjustments.

Q: How is the CERT funded?

A: Congress has provided funds through the Citizen Corps program to the States and Territories. Grants from these funds may be available to local communities to start CERT programs. Contact your State Citizen Corps point of contact to learn more about grant possibilities.

Also, there are a variety of local approaches to funding. Some communities build costs into their local budget while others charge participants to attend training to cover costs for instructors and course materials. In a few communities, CERT organizations have formed 501 (C) 3 for non-profit status to allow them to do fundraising and seek corporate donations.

Q: Why take the CERT training?

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A government prepares for everyday emergencies. However, there can be an emergency or disaster that can overwhelm the community's immediate response capability. While adjacent jurisdictions, State and Federal resources can activate to help, there may be a delay for them getting to those who need them. The primary reason for CERT training is to give people the decision-making, organizational, and practical skills to offer immediate assistance to family members, neighbors, and associates while waiting for help. While people will respond to others in need without the training, the goal of the CERT program is to help people do so effectively and efficiently without placing themselves in unnecessary danger.

A success story about CERTs comes from events during the wildfires in Florida. The Edgewater CERT helped emergency management and the fire department personnel by assisting with evacuation; handling donations; preparing food for firefighters; and answering the phone while the professionals were fighting the fire. This is a great example of CERT members and response personnel working together for the benefit of the community.

Q: Who can take the training?

A: Naturals for the training are neighborhood watch, community organizations, communities of faith, school staff, workplace employees, scouting organization and other groups that come together regularly for a common purpose. CERT skills are useful in disaster and everyday life events.

Q: How do I take CERT training?

A: To become a CERT member, you will have to take the CERT training from a sponsoring agency like an emergency management agency, fire department or police department in the area where you live or work. Contact the local emergency manager where you live or work and ask about the education and training opportunities available to you. Let this person know about your interest in CERT.

Q: What if I want to do more than just the basic training?

A: CERT members can increase their knowledge and capability by attending classes provided by other community agencies on animal care, special needs concerns, donation management, community relations, shelter management, debris removal, utilities control, advanced first aid, Automatic External Defibrillator use, CPR skills, and others. The sponsoring agency should maintain records of this training and call upon CERT members when these additional skills are needed in the community.

CERT member also can use their skills to help the program flourish by volunteering to schedule events, produce a newsletter, perform administrative work, and take leadership positions.

Q: How do CERT members maintain their skills?

A: CERT members and the local sponsoring agency work together to maintain team skills and the working partnership. It is suggested that the sponsor conduct refresher classes and an annual exercise where all CERT members are invited to participate. Some response agencies have conducted joint exercises with CERT teams and operate as they would during an actual disaster. The last point does bring up a lesson learned. Besides training CERT members, it is also important to educate members of response agencies in the community about CERTs, the skills that team members have learned during training and the role that they will have during a major disaster. One way to develop trust between CERT and responders is by encouraging agency personnel to participate in classes as instructors and coaches and in activities with CERT members.

Understanding that CERTs may operate independently following a disaster. CERTs can practice this independence by taking some responsibility for their own training. Teams can design activities and exercises for themselves and with other teams. Some members can be rescuers, some victims, and some evaluators. After the event, there can be a social so that community teams can discuss the exercise and get to know each other.

Q: Can someone under age 18 participate?

A: This is a local decision. Someone under 18 should be with a parent or have permission to attend. Some communities have reached out specifically to young people. Winter Springs High School in Florida offers the training to high school students. You can read an article about this. CERT is a great way to address the community service requirements for high school students and provides students with useful skills. CERT also fits nicely with training given to Boy and Girl Scouts and the Civil Air patrol.

Q: What if I have concerns about my age or physical ability?

A: There are many jobs within a CERT for someone who wants to be involved and help. Following a disaster, CERT members are needed for documentation, comforting others, logistics, etc. Non-disaster related team activities may include keeping databases, developing a website, writing a newsletter, planning activities, helping with special events and organizing exercises and activities.

During CERT classroom training, if one has a concern about doing a skill like lifting, just let the instructor know. You can learn from watching. We would like everyone who wants to go through the training to have an opportunity to participate and learn the skills. CERT educates participants about local hazards and trains them in skills that are useful during disaster and life's everyday emergencies.

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Q: What about liability?

A: The text of the Volunteer Protection Act of 1997 is available for viewing. Also there is information about State Liability Laws located on the Citizen Corps website. During training, each sponsoring agency should brief its CERT members about their responsibilities as a CERT member and volunteer. Finally, there is a job aid on liability for you to review in our Start a CERT Program section.

The CERT material was developed by the Los Angeles City Fire Department and adopted by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 1993. The CERT manual contains basic and straightforward material that has been accepted by those using it as the standard for training.

It is important to remember that the best sources of help in emergencies are professional responders. However, in situations when they are not immediately available, people will want to act and help. We have seen this time and again in our history. CERT training teaches skills that people can use to safely help while waiting for responders. The alternate is to do nothing and that is not in our nature.

Last Updated: 06/27/2012 - 18:29

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