



CERT Teams Assist with Texas Chemical Plant Explosion, Aftermath

An emergency can strike any place, at any time. While CERT teams across the country are trained to provide assistance when emergencies occur, it is not every day that they find themselves mobilizing in response to a local disaster that garners national headlines.

When a fire led to a devastating explosion in April 2013 at the West Fertilizer Company in the town of West, Texas, CERT teams from the region responded quickly. As news of the disaster spread and hundreds of first responders arrived on the scene, CERT volunteers undertook a critical mission of their own: tracking responder time and resources to ensure safety and accountability.

“The CERT teams [that helped in the aftermath] had never been involved in a large-scale disaster and only

had training and exercises they participated in to fall back on,” said Boyce Wilson, Regional Program Manager for Heart of Texas Regional Citizen Corps Council, praising the CERT response. “The tireless efforts of the volunteers made the difference,” he added.

That spirit of goodwill was the motivation behind a particularly concerned segment of the local community that immediately sought ways to help. In the hours following the explosion, students from the Texas Valley Mills Independent School District, located an hour away from the disaster site, began lining up outside the office of Gaye Lynn Seawright, the district’s assistant superintendent, asking her what they could do.

“They were willing to stand up and do whatever they could to help,” Seawright said.

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Valley Mills ISD Teen CERT at the Texas Council of Governments Citizen Corps Awards Banquet

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Valley Mills students organized fundraising drives and coordinated food and clothing donations to assist the survivors and family members affected by the explosion.

“The students were the ones who took the initiative to say this is bad, we have the ability to do something,” Wilson explained. “They found a way to work within the existing command structure to make a positive difference.”

In recognition of the service of Texas CERT programs following the West, Texas explosion and their outstanding work during the past five years, the Texas Council of Governments honored Texas CERT programs at its annual Citizen Corps Awards Banquet in September 2013.

Wilson believes the success of these CERT programs stems from what he characterized as the well-rounded,

community-focused approach to their work throughout the Lone Star State. “It takes a community to respond to a disaster,” he said.

“ The tireless efforts of the volunteers made the difference. ”

– Boyce Wilson

FEMA Honors Preparedness Award Winners

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) honored the winners of the 2012 and 2013 Individual and Community Preparedness Awards at an event in Washington, DC this past September. FEMA recognized the recipients for their contributions to disaster preparedness and response in their communities. Several of the honorees represented local CERT programs from across the country, and shared their experiences and best practices.

FEMA’s event was more than an opportunity to honor innovative and dedicated individuals, organizations, and communities. It also highlighted the many critically important contributions that CERT programs across the country make to their local communities each and every day.

With individuals from CERT teams in Newport Beach and Los Angeles in attendance, the awards shined a bright light on important preparedness efforts underway in California. FEMA honored the Newport Beach CERT team for finding innovative ways to keep volunteers active in the community. Hosting weekly events and adopting a neighborhood-oriented approach to volunteering has enabled the program to grow significantly in recent years. Today, the city boasts the largest per-capita CERT volunteer-to-resident ratio in California, with



Newport Beach CERT at an informational event.

more than 1,000 active volunteers. Several honorees in attendance said they believed that the award would enhance their efforts to strengthen the reputation of their CERT programs in their communities while also helping them to attract new volunteers and partnerships.

FEMA also honored the South Los Angeles (L.A.) Teen CERT Collaborative, another Southern California CERT program. FEMA recognized this team for its efforts to empower teens with basic disaster preparedness knowledge and response skills. The L.A. program focuses on multijurisdictional collaboration to reach underserved populations and break down racial and socioeconomic barriers by teaching community safety and preparedness.

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FEMA Honors Preparedness Award Winners

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For example, the Collaborative teamed up with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) to provide transportation for the teens to receive training in a safe learning environment. This has helped the LAPD to open its doors to future youth engagement opportunities across a diverse segment of the city. In addition, the program has introduced young people to potential career paths in police, fire, and emergency medical technician (EMT) services.

“The students graduating from the program are not only connecting with each other, but bringing valuable skills back to their communities as well,” said Adnan Khan, an L.A. CERT volunteer.

At the September event, FEMA also honored the West Pierce Fire and Rescue CERT program, based in Washington State, for its efforts to collaborate with a wide variety of stakeholders and involve them in emergency preparedness. The program trains and integrates volunteers and prepares them for opportunities to employ their skills. For the West Pierce Fire and Rescue CERT, building an effective program requires bringing together volunteers from among a very diverse population in their community. The program draws membership from both high- and low-income populations, and includes members of the military, first responders, teachers, clergy, social workers, business owners, and individuals who speak English as a second language. Since the program’s inception, hundreds of volunteers have completed a tailored training program that caters to individuals with diverse sets of skills.



South L.A. CERT partners gather in D.C. to receive their award.

“We really view this as their program,” said Colleen Adler, West Pierce County Emergency Preparedness Coordinator. “We want to support them and give them ownership to either institute their ideas or assist them to institute the ideas.”

The state of Texas also had a prominent presence at FEMA’s event. FEMA recognized Texas State Citizen Corps for pursuing a collaborative approach with local governments that encouraged them to share valuable resources and volunteers. Because of that collaboration, the Texas Citizen Corps was able to develop an engaged volunteer base that logged nearly 311,000 volunteer hours during 2012 and the first three quarters of 2013. Forming these relationships also ensured that local officials felt ownership of their programs while still having the support of a broader, organized volunteer network across the state.

In addition, the City of Austin CERT shared its approach for addressing a common challenge – keeping volunteers engaged. Despite experiencing growing enrollment, Austin CERT volunteers were at risk of losing interest following their training. To address this issue, the program established key relationships with several local partners. Working together with the Austin Fire Department, Austin Water Utility, and other city organizations, the program was able to create multiple opportunities for CERT volunteers to have a meaningful impact on the safety and resilience of their community, from making sure that neighborhood homes were properly equipped with fire protection materials to monitoring local water facilities to check for anomalies.

“ *The students graduating from the program are not only connecting with each other, but bringing valuable skills back to their communities as well...* ”

– Adnan Khan



North Carolina Central University Welcomes CERT

In many college towns, the campus and its student body represent a significant, if not the largest, segment of the local community. In these areas, CERT programs composed of college students and faculty can have a tremendous impact.

That reality has not been lost on North Carolina Central University (NCCU) in Durham, whose CERT program functions as a critical campus safety net by enabling student volunteers to play a role in campus security and response during emergency situations.

The goals of NCCU's CERT program fit well with student and academic life on the campus, which is one key to

the program's success. Students who participate in the program are able to earn mandatory community service hours. The CERT program is also incorporated directly into coursework of students enrolled in the NCCU Department of Criminal Justice.

"It's a win-win," said M. Chris Herring, Executive Director of the NCCU Institute for Homeland Security and Workforce Development. "[Students] are getting credit, and they're getting skills they can take home with them," he said.

That's another benefit of NCCU's CERT program – when students graduate or return home during breaks, they take their training and commitment to CERT

with them, and pursue opportunities to expand preparedness activities in their hometowns and workplaces.

Other college campuses can follow NCCU's example. By developing a CERT program that is closely integrated with student life and has the strong support of faculty and campus administrators, NCCU is playing an important role in supporting the community and making it more resilient in times of emergency.

New 2014 Training Dates Announced

Course Name:
*E0427 Community
Emergency Response Team
(CERT) Program Manager*

Course Description:
This course prepares participants to establish and sustain an active local CERT program.

Course Dates:
May 15–16, 2014
August 1–2, 2014

Link for more information
(<http://training.fema.gov/Apply>)

Course Name:
*E0428 Community
Emergency Response Team
(CERT) Train-the-Trainer*

Course Dates:
May 12–14, 2014
July 28–30, 2014

Course Description:
This course prepares participants to deliver FEMA's *CERT Basic Training* course.

Link for more information
(<http://training.fema.gov/Apply>)

Apply for the 2014 FEMA Individual and Community Preparedness Awards

We hope that you enjoyed reading about the outstanding CERT programs that were recognized in the 2012 and 2013 FEMA Individual and Community Preparedness Awards. Now your program can be recognized too – apply for the 2014 Awards today!

Applications for the Individual and Community Preparedness Awards are being accepted through May 30, 2014, and the winners will be announced in the fall. Additional information and application materials are available on the [Awards website](#).

Applications must be submitted to citizencorps@fema.dhs.gov by May 30, 2014 at 11:59 PM EDT.

We wish you the best of luck!



Submitting Stories to the National CERT Newsletter

We want to hear from you! We recognize the hard work, training, and dedication you have put into CERT, and we want to highlight your accomplishments. Stories, tips, and best practices are extremely beneficial to your fellow CERT members across the country. Don't wait — send us your stories today!

The National CERT Office welcomes your stories, which we can feature in two different publications:

- CERT Newsletter – Published quarterly
- CERT in Action – Activations in actual emergencies

When submitting a story, please include:

- City/state of event
- Names of people/organizations involved
- Date(s) of activity
- Author's name and contact information
- Other relevant information

How to submit: Send your articles to CERT@fema.dhs.gov, and include in the subject line, "Submission for CERT Newsletter."

Note: CERT retains the right to edit all stories for length, clarity, and accuracy.

Acceptance: Publication of submitted materials is based on a variety of factors, including but not limited to timeliness, space availability, completeness of information, and relevance.

Disclaimer: *The reader recognizes that the federal government provides links and informational data on various disaster preparedness resources and events and does not endorse any non-federal events, entities, organizations, services or products. Please let us know about other events and services for individual and community preparedness that could be included in future newsletters by contacting cert@fema.dhs.gov.*