

Hamden CERT Supports Residents, Firefighters in Overnight Apartment Blaze

In February, Hamden (Conn.) CERT brought relief to a number of displaced individuals after an overnight fire tore through their 28-unit apartment building. The blaze, which began on the first floor, spread through all three floors, and eventually collapsed the building's roof and part of its third floor.

While all residents were able to evacuate, they had to wait outside in subfreezing temperatures, many having left their car keys and even their shoes behind. As a result, residents—adults, children, and pets—faced another challenge: keeping warm. Enter Hamden CERT. Ten members of the team arrived on the scene and acted immediately, improvising shelters in police cars and fire trucks' passenger cabs so residents had a warm place to wait.



Hamden CERT members supported residents and firefighters in response to apartment building fire.

Approximately 20 minutes later, the Hamden CERT mobile command unit arrived on the scene, and CERT volunteers began processing the residents for the American Red Cross, determining which residents had places to stay for the night and which ones did not. CERT volunteers also provided valuable assistance by distributing ice melt at the scene and setting up coolers of water and a coffee station for the firefighters working in the cold to help keep them hydrated and warm.

Once the firefighters brought the blaze under control, CERT volunteers assisted with organizing the building residents so firefighters could escort them back into their homes to grab needed personal items.

Robert Freeman, Deputy Director of Emergency Management for the town of Hamden and the Hamden CERT director, praised the CERT volunteers for their hard work and dedication to the community. Freeman credited the CERT program's extensive training and engagement opportunities with making sure volunteers knew exactly what to do.



The Hamden CERT Mobile Command Unit is a key tool in activations

In 2013, the Hamden CERT program engaged with the community on 58 different occasions, participating in emergency activities, monthly meetings, and other events. “Every action is a learning experience,” Freeman said. Monthly meetings include a training component so processes, procedures, and essential steps become second nature for CERT members. Freeman also thanked David Baradesca, the Chief of the Hamden Fire Department and the Emergency Management Director of Hamden, for his support of the Hamden CERT program.

Hamden CERT offers *CERT Basic Training* for individuals who are interested in joining the team or who want to learn preparedness and basic response measures for the well-being of themselves and their families. Freeman stated the training provides incredible value, whether or not a participant chooses to join an active team. “It’s like adding a fire extinguisher, smoke and CO detectors to every home of every person we connect with,” he said.