

### Springville, UT CERT Engages Whole Community in Preparedness

Located 45 miles south of Salt Lake City, Springville is a relatively quiet community of about 31,000 residents situated next to the Wasatch Mountains. While Springville rarely experiences disasters, the local Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) steps up when they do, filling and placing sandbags throughout the city during floods and assisting with traffic control during periodic mountain fires.

Springville CERT operates under the city's Department of Public Safety, and nearly 1,200 people (almost 4 percent of the entire population) have completed CERT training since the program's inception 15 years ago. However, like many CERT programs, Springville CERT finds it challenging to keep volunteers engaged given the relative infrequency of disasters in the community. The city itself, for similar reasons, must also be very proactive about getting the general public interested and involved in disaster preparedness. Springville and its CERT program address these challenges primarily through strategic partnerships with key community stakeholders and regular community-wide drills.



CERT volunteers assess a mock survivor's injuries during a simulated building collapse drill.

70 percent of the population of Springville is made up of congregants from the Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter Day Saints, which also has its own emergency preparedness program. "They have been a great help in encouraging church members to join CERT," said Springville Police Department Chief Scott Finlayson. "This is one of the best ways we have to get people to join the program."

CERT coordinators regularly meet with the church's leadership to make sure that both programs are cooperating, but not duplicating efforts. "We try to overlap our efforts onto theirs because they already have a good communication system in place and a willingness to work and participate," said Finlayson. "We try to merge our system with theirs, and they've done a good job of making their program work with ours too."

CERT also partners with the local school district to collect parents' emergency contact information. CERT uses this information to sign them up for Springville's Reverse 911 system, which alerts and informs residents about potential hazards. CERT volunteers also reach out to their neighbors to encourage them to subscribe to this service.

"We had a hillside fire since the first implementation. The Reverse 911 system worked very well in keeping the community notified of the progress of the fire, places to evacuate, and general preparedness information," said Springville Fire Department Chief Henry Clinton. "We're still in learning process with the system. There's a fine line in giving people the right amount of information, but at least it's a method of getting out official information and not rumors. It certainly gets people's attention." In

the two years since Springville implemented Reverse 911, over 8,000 residents (over a quarter of the population) have signed up it.

Springville also conducts a citywide drill every August to keep residents actively involved in preparedness efforts. The drill involves CERT volunteers, public safety agencies, businesses, and churches. These organizations meet monthly to plan the annual exercise, which is intended to test the community's emergency plan. Per that plan, Springville is divided into 8 sectors, each with their own



CERT volunteers remove a mock survivor from a building during the simulated building collapse drill.

HAM radio operator responsible for maintaining communications with city leaders and CERT coordinators. Each sector is also divided into smaller areas (640 total in the city) led by neighborhood block captains.

During the exercise, block captains walk through their assigned areas to collect emergency notification cards, which are distributed to residents subscribed to Reverse 911 just before the start of the drill. Hundreds of participating residents use these cards to report whether they have received a drill notification via Reverse 911. This allows the community to test the system and ensure that subscribers are able to receive alerts and warnings. The block captains report the results to sector leaders, who send that information on to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). This year, nearly 500 residents participated in the drill.

“We learned that the system of having people go through the community worked,” said Finlayson.

“We need to be diligent in testing our system once a year so people recognize that it’s important and why, and keep it at the forefront.”

Several fault lines run through Springville, so the annual drill also features a simulated earthquake that results in a building collapse. CERT volunteers help perform a variety of tasks during the exercise, including resource management, triage, and medical treatment. Volunteers also work with the Fire Department to prepare 30 mock patients and transport them to local hospitals. Volunteers have radios to stay in contact with each other, and work together to conduct searches, shut off power, and set up treatment areas. This year, Springville added an assistant radio operator in the EOC radio room to help coordinate radio communications among participating CERT volunteers and reduce the overall number of transmissions.

Each year, Springville CERT takes several measures to make the drill more realistic for its volunteers. For example, instead of gathering at the scene of the incident, volunteers report to a pre-designated meeting area. Upon their arrival, drill coordinators notify them of where they are needed. CERT volunteers participating in the drill are also responsible for bringing their own supplies. This encourages

volunteers to be creative and improvise, as they may not always have exactly what they need at hand during an actual emergency.

Springville's professional responders and emergency managers know they don't have the resources of larger cities, which makes cooperation with local residents imperative. In the event of a city or county-wide disaster, resources will be stretched thin, and the entire community will have to come together as a single, organized, unified team to mount an effective response. Organizing drills and establishing partnerships helps to ensure that residents, volunteers, and professional responders will be able to work well with each other. "We recognize that when a disaster strikes, you have to work together and help each other out. If you could summarize our CERT program, it would be neighbors helping neighbors," said Clinton.

If you are interested in planning and organizing a drill or exercise in your community, visit [www.ready.gov/prepare](http://www.ready.gov/prepare) for tools and resources that you can use to help members of your community practice what to do, where to go, and how to stay safe during wildfires, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, tornados, and winter storms.