

CERT Fire Safety Transcript

[MUSIC]

Fires...they can be volatile, unpredictable, and extremely dangerous. They can start small, and spread very quickly...Threatening lives and destroying property. Following a disaster, fires may start from damaged electrical lines, natural gas or propane gas leaks, the mixing of incompatible hazardous materials, and the inappropriate use of candles and matches.

Since firefighters will not be able to respond immediately to all damaged areas, CERT team members train to shut off utilities and extinguish small fires before they spread. When and how to use a fire extinguisher is an important component of CERT hands-on training.

MAN: fire out!

WOMAN: fire out!

MAN: backing out.

WOMAN: backing out.

The CERT team is important to the community because, after a disaster, there's times when the fire department or other emergency people are overwhelmed. The CERT people actually provide care until the professionals can arrive. Following a disaster, the CERT team member's role is to size-up the situation and, if safe, extinguish small fires.

We teach CERT members how to put out small fires. We specifically tell them how to use a fire extinguisher and how to put out small fires. CERTs have to realize that they can do an awful lot of good, without necessarily putting the fire out, by getting other people out of harm's way as well.

Safety is always the number one priority for the CERT team member and his or her buddy. And the team member must keep that in mind in everything he or she does. You need to take care of yourself, that's the number one rule, take care of yourself and your buddy after a disaster.

We teach them how to extinguish fires, but probably most of all, we teach them how to respect the fires. If there is a fire in a home, we don't want them to feel that they can, by the virtue of being a CERT person, can walk into a house that's on fire to look for victims. So we would teach them to respect the fire. Don't go in and become -- again, become a victim yourself.

CERT teams should never enter a smoke-filled building. But if they see a fire in a building or even outside, they should notify the fire department. So we try to reinforce to people not only, yes, you can do this -- you can use this fire extinguisher that you brought off the wall and you can pull, aim, squeeze, and sweep. >But you should also know when you shouldn't or can't be there. But the most important thing for any CERT member to realize is where their role ends and the fire department's kind of picks up.

CERT team members will demonstrate the proper strategies for extinguishing a small fire.

MAN: You can get out that way, You can get out that way.

WOMAN: Okay. Ready? Think we can do this?

MAN: Test.

BOTH: Pull.

WOMAN: Test! Okay.

MAN: Straight in?

WOMAN: Uh, yeah, we go >straight in. Going in!

MAN: Going in!

WOMAN: Aim! Squeeze! Sweep!

WOMAN: Fire out!

MAN: Fire out!

WOMAN: Back up.

MAN: Backing out. Overhaul.

WOMAN: Overhaul. Looks like it's all right.

MAN: Backing out.

WOMAN: Backing out.

Fires are dangerous because they can spread very quickly. In less than 30 seconds, a small flame can get completely out of control and turn into a raging fire. The heat, flames, and smoke are all deadly. While a fire's heat alone can kill, the smoke and toxic gases from the fire will often disable and kill people before the flames do. Usually, when fires start, they may not produce much smoke. But quickly, they can change and produce thick, black smoke that spreads from the ceiling to the floor. Breathing even small amounts of this smoke and toxic gases can make people cough uncontrollably. The smoke can also be very disorienting.

Because fires can be so volatile and change so quickly, CERT team members should only attempt to put out small fires, when it is safe to extinguish them. Three elements are needed to create and sustain a fire. They are -- heat, fuel, and oxygen. Working together, these three elements result in a chemical reaction that is fire. Heat is required to elevate the temperature of a solid, liquid, or gas. The fuel is what is burned, and can be solid, liquid, or gas. Oxygen is needed for the fire to burn. These three elements -- fuel, heat, and oxygen -- create and sustain a fire.

When any of these three elements are taken away, and the reaction is interrupted, the fire will not burn. Knowing what is fueling the fire is very important, because it dictates how the fire can be extinguished. Firefighters classify fires according to the kind of fuel that is burning.

Class A fires are fueled by ordinary combustible materials, like paper, cloth, and wood.

Class B fires are fed by flammable liquids, such as gasoline; and combustible liquids, such as charcoal lighter fluid and kerosene.

Class C fires are energized electrical equipment, such as wiring or motors. When the power source is cut off, the fire generally becomes a Class A fire.

Class D fires are caused by combustible metals, such as magnesium and titanium. Class D fires are not usually found in residential areas.

CERT team members are trained to put out small fires with portable fire extinguishers. The dry chemical fire extinguisher, which is the most common kind of portable fire extinguisher, is to be used. Dry chemical extinguishers are rated for Class A, B, and C fires. Remember, Class A fires involve ordinary combustible materials, Class B fires involve flammable liquids, and Class C fires involve energized electrical.

Operating a portable fire extinguisher is easy once you know the steps involved. A portable fire extinguisher has four components -- a hose or nozzle, a pressure gauge, a carrying handle with a trigger, and the cylinder. The standard range for the dry chemical extinguisher to shoot is 8 to 12 feet. Using a fire extinguisher is a skill. CERT team members need to practice using the fire extinguisher so that they are comfortable using it.

Portable fire extinguishers should always be operated upright. When you operate a fire extinguisher, aim at the base of the fire. Remember the word "PASS." It stands for... Pull, Aim, Squeeze, and Sweep. First, pull the safety pin located in the handle. You'll have to twist it to break the seal. Test the extinguisher to make sure it works before approaching the fire. Then, as you move towards the fire, aim the hose or nozzle at the base of the fire. Next, when you are within operating range of the extinguisher -- 8 to 12 feet -- squeeze the trigger of the extinguisher. Then, sweep the base of the fire with the stream of dry chemical until the fire is out.

WOMAN: Fire out!

NARRATOR: Before the CERT team member and his or her buddy decide to use a fire extinguisher, there are several questions to ask as part of the size-up -- Is the fire small enough to fight? Do we have the right type of fire extinguisher? Is the fire extinguisher large enough to put out the fire? Can we escape quickly and safely from the area if we attempt to extinguish the fire? Is the area free of other hazards, such as falling debris? If you can answer "yes" to all of these questions, you can attempt to put out the fire. If you answer "no" to any of them, leave the area immediately.

If you are caught in a house when a fire has broken out, leave immediately. Shut all the doors as you leave to slow the spread of the fire. As a CERT team member, it's important for you to follow CERT procedures whenever you're dealing with fires. First, you must size-up the situation and determine what action you want to take. In every situation, that means your safety and the safety of your buddy is first.

The size-up is a process that you use to make decisions and act appropriately. Size-up is an ongoing process. If conditions change, you need to reevaluate your course of action to adjust to the changing conditions. You look before you leap. You don't just rush into things. You go out, you look, you think your way through things. You're in an unfamiliar environment, even if it's your own backyard, so, you go out and you pay attention.

The house that looks normal, you walk in, but there's a hole in the floor. The smell of gas, the sound of gas escaping into this enclosed area. You walk outside to take care of utilities, and you can't. This is a hazard. Back away. Put some tape up there, keep other people from that.

There are situations -- like with electricity. People tend to believe that when the power is off from a disaster, it's off everywhere. We fail to understand that it is the power company's mission to keep power on, not keep power off.

NARRATOR: Remember to always ask these questions -- Is the fire small enough to fight? Can my buddy and I fight the fire safely? Do we have the right equipment? Is the area free of other hazards? Is the building structurally sound? Can my buddy and I escape? Always wear all of your safety equipment -- your helmet, goggles, dust mask, gloves, and boots. Wear all of your gear all of the time.

Well, it's important to wear the right gear and keep it together. People tend to wear pieces of gear -- partial ensembles, you know? They don't want to wear the whole thing. Unfortunately, when you get out there and you cut your head open, then you realize you should have had your helmet on. The whole idea behind those things is the same idea behind a safety belt. You don't know when you're going to get in an accident, you don't know what's going to happen. If you've got your helmet on when something falls on your head unexpectedly, it's going to make all the difference in the world for you.

NARRATOR: CERT team members are trained to always work with a buddy. If you are conducting a size-up and evaluating what strategy you should take in the situation, consult with your buddy and develop a plan of action.

The buddy system has been around ever since the beginning of time. You never go swimming alone, you never dive alone, you never do anything alone. The whole premise is that, if something happens to me, I can send somebody out to get help. We teach the buddy system. So you always want to have at least one other person there. And really, that's for accountability issues. If, God forbid, you and I are working and we're searching a building and I go in by myself or we go in together and something happens, there's no way that anyone will know that we need help. And it's really accountability and safety. Because we don't want to become part of the problem, we want to be part of the solution.

NARRATOR: Fires can spread much faster than you think. Always have two ways to exit the fire area. A second escape route is necessary in case your main escape route becomes blocked. CERT team members will demonstrate the proper procedures for extinguishing a small fire.

First, they are dressed in their proper safety gear and they work together with their buddy. When they notice the fire, they size-up the situation by gathering facts -- like the size of the fire, the direction of the wind, and how they could exit if the fire grew larger. If they establish that the situation is safe, they walk towards the fire. The first team member attempts to extinguish the fire while the second team member watches out for his or her buddy and any changing conditions. The second CERT team member serves as his or her backup. The CERT team member uses the P.A.S.S. method to extinguish the fire.

WOMAN: Fire out!

MAN: Fire out!

WOMAN: Back up.]

MAN: Backing out. Overhaul.

WOMAN: Overhaul. Looks like it's all right.

MAN: Backing out.

WOMAN: Backing out.

NARRATOR: If you are in a damaged building, you should always feel the closed door with the back of your hand before opening it, starting at the bottom of the door, and move the back of your hand towards the top. Don't touch the door handle before feeling the door. If the door feels hot, there is a fire burning behind it. Don't enter the other room. Repeat -- do not enter. If you open the door, you are feeding the fire with more oxygen. Leave the building and notify the fire department. Whenever possible, confine the fire by keeping the doors closed.

Smoke naturally rises. If you have to get out of a building that is on fire, keep low to the ground, where there is less smoke.

Remember the effective range of your fire extinguisher. Don't get closer than you need to -- 8 to 12 feet -- to extinguish the fire. Overhaul the fire to make sure that it's extinguished -- and stays extinguished. You'll overhaul a fire by locating any potential sources of re-ignition, such as deep-seated burning material.

As in all CERT operations, safety is your number one priority. To review -- Wear protective gear. Work with a buddy and a team. Plan for safe entry and exit. Maintain a safe distance and position from a fire. Extinguish small fires using the proper equipment. Use the P.A.S.S. procedure to operate fire extinguishers. And remember, it is better to notify professional first responders of a fire situation than risk your life or the life of your buddy, attempting to extinguish a fire that is too large. Fires are dangerous and can change quickly. The CERT team member's safety is always the number one priority.