

Ask #CERT Transcript

Tyler – Welcome everybody. Hi, my name is Tyler Krska. I'm here with FEMA's Individual and Community Preparedness Division. I'm the National Community Emergency Response Team Program Lead. We're here today to talk to you about how Community Emergency Response Teams or CERTs can help you and your community be more prepared. I'm here with a wonderful team of volunteers and program managers from the local area that work with CERT. Before we begin though, I want to say that any views expressed here may not necessarily be the views held by the Department of Homeland Security or FEMA. Also, I want to encourage everybody to share this with your followers. We always love to get more people in here asking questions and learning about CERT. So before I jump in, why don't we have them introduce themselves?

Dana – Hi, I'm Dana Powers. I'm the Assistant Program Manager for CERT in Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department in Fairfax, Virginia.

Missy - And with Fairfax my name is Missy Tuttlefelio. I serve as the Volunteer Lead for the program.

James – And I am James Morrow. I'm the Volunteer Service Coordinator for Prince Georges County.

Tyler – Awesome. We have a great group of people here. I'm really excited to ask them some questions. So let's jump right in. The first question is one that I had. Why did you decide to become a CERT volunteer?

Dana – That would be you Missy.

Missy – Okay, I decided to join CERT because it was almost for me like Girl Scouts for grownups. I had grown up as a Girl Scout and had always had that preparedness mindset. And when my family and I moved to Northern Virginia, I was looking for something that would help me expand my knowledge. And I saw a CERT outreach table. Looked at the information they offered and took the class and it's been amazing ever since.

James – Personally, when I came aboard CERT was in 2003. I retired from the Army and went into my community where I lived and became the Community Association President. At that time, I was looking for a way of keeping my citizens informed about emergencies that could occur and give them a knowledge base of knowing what to do during that time.

Dana – We started our program in 2003 as well when it first became available through UASI. Our fire chief came to us with this program and started it up, and it's been incredibly popular with the citizens and the residents of Fairfax County. I mean and we get volunteers like this. I mean, so eager, so helpful, very knowledgeable. All of them have, you know they bring to the table a lot of different skills and knowledge from their life experience and they're incredibly helpful and have put in a lot of hours.

Tyler Krska – To go along with that, with your CERT teams, how does being a part of this community help you prepare for emergencies?

Missy – I think that when you have knowledge, it really is power. You tend to put yourself in less dangerous situations. You seem to make smarter decisions. And, you often don't find yourselves in a bad situation because

you've thought about it ahead of time. So, really just having that knowledge base makes you prepared and makes the people around you safer as well. It's a win for everyone.

James – And speaking on a win for everyone, what I've found is that from the community perspective, when something happens it's not just going to happen to one community. It's going to be a lot of people involved. And having that knowledge base, you get a better sense of I can do something to help myself and my family and my community.

Dana – Absolutely, and from a Fire and Rescue perspective, you know, the few victims that you have the better it is. We've trained over 2,500 people in Fairfax, and to us that's 2,500 less victims that we are going to have when there's a major event. And that's very helpful to first responders.

Tyler – So, what would you say to someone who's brand new, just heard about CERT? What would you do to get them to join your team?

James – One of the things that I would talk to the person about or say to the person to get them to join my team is as long as you believe that I can do something. A lot of people are active in their communities in different perspectives, but a lot of them don't take that step to say I can do something to help other people. And if you have that base that says I can help someone, this is the thing for you.

Missy – I also think that because we live in the National Capital Region, we are so blessed with resources and talent that often times we become complacent. And if you think about it, we really had many disasters of inconvenience but not a lot of loss of life or property in a significant period of time. When you think about those catastrophic events, and you ask yourself, "Are you prepared? Do you have 72 hours' worth of whatever it is you might need in your home for yourself and your loved ones, your pets. Are you prepared in your car if you get stuck in a snowmageddon? Or, are you prepared at work should something bad happen? If you can't answer "yes" to those questions, then CERT is a free way for you to get some great education, network with some wonderful people, and gain some skills that are going to keep you safe, your family safe, and your community safe.

James – And that can't be stated enough, really.

Missy – High five, you're right.

Dana – That's for sure. And there are a lot of organizations already in place that lend themselves to forming CERT Teams. I mean, you have your Home Owners Association, you have...

Missy – Churches.

Dana – Churches and clubs and stuff like that.

James – Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

Dana – So we do pair with them quite often. Neighborhood Watch is another one that, you know, if you can hook in with your Neighborhood Watch and form a CERT Team through them, you know, it's definitely beneficial to everybody.

Tyler – And we've also come out with a number of, it's the same CERT program that we all know and love, but you have Campus CERT, Teen CERT, Workplace CERT. So we have taken the CERT materials and adapted it for these specific different communities to go in.

Dana – Yeah, we've taught several corporate CERT classes to businesses in the National Capital Region, and it's been very beneficial to them as well.

Missy – Yeah, the wonderful thing about the CERT Program is that it's based on what each individual needs for themselves, their families, and their communities. We have the opportunity to do a lot of cross training in Prince Georges County, in Montgomery County, all over Virginia as well. CERT is a great foundation of training, but how we each apply it is a little bit different, and that's the beautiful thing about it is that it's different for everyone as it should be.

Tyler – All right, so what was your most rewarding experience or most fun experience in CERT?

James – The one thing that I had the opportunity to do very early on was go to the site where got the tunnels dug and dug in the tunnels and pulled people out. That's the first time that we met.

Missy – Yes.

James – And it was an exciting time.

Missy – It was a rubble pile. There weren't real injured people. It was a training. We need to clarify.

James – Yes, we do need to clarify that. But at that training session, what I found myself doing was finding that there were other people throughout the county and the National Capital Region that we were working with and made a bigger perspective of people coming together.

Dana – Yes, and this weekend, well, actually next weekend, the 24th and 25th of September, Fairfax County is hosting CERTCON 2016.

Missy – Woohoo.

Dana – And we are all getting together. Robert will be there. We'll have our partners from Montgomery County, Anne Arundel County, Annapolis, all over the National Capital Region. And we are going to have two days of learning and exercise and refreshing of our skills, and it's going to be a lot of fun.

Missy – And lots of duct tape.

Dana – Lots of duct tape.

James – And leading into that, this Saturday, Prince Georges County is hosting their Citizens Preparedness Conference, which is going to be at Prince Georges Community College. And this is a very big thing for citizens. It's an outreach to citizens to say this is what our Office of Emergency Management is doing. This is how we keep you informed. And these are some of the things we want to share with you. The very importance of being prepared and learning how to be prepared.

Tyler – That’s great. And it just goes to show that CERT isn’t just a class that people come to. It’s actually, you can use it to reach out to the community. Even if you don’t take CERT training, you can still help your community be prepared in these events.

Dana – Absolutely.

Missy – Absolutely.

Tyler – Were there any questions that you guys had? That maybe I could help answer.

Missy – Are you going to be at CERTCON 2016? That’s our question.

Tyler – I’m going to do my best to make it. I’ll see if I can rearrange my schedule for you.

Missy – We would love to have you.

Dana – So you said there was new curriculum coming out for CERT. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

Tyler – Sure, so the CERT Curriculum like you mentioned, the CERT became available nationwide in 2003. The last time the CERT Curriculum was updated with new information and practices with in 2011. So it’s getting around that time we need to update. So that’s been my major job for the past couple months. We’re hoping that it’ll get turned around and out to everyone quickly. I’ll make sure that I announce it far and wide so everyone knows it’s coming.

Dana – Very good. We need to be prepare for that when it changes.

Tyler – I’m sure. We had a question come in. Someone asked how do we start a CERT Team in your own community?

James – That’s a very beautiful question, if you don’t mind me joining in. The first thing that you would want to do is get in contact with your person that is at your Office of Emergency Management who is the lead person for the CERT Program. You can also take training online with FEMA. They have a lot of classes there that talk about getting the citizens prepared. Once you take the CERT Training class, then there’s a process that I use for us to help citizens start teams in their own local areas. Missy, join in.

Missy – In our jurisdiction, we have some teams that are already established. So if you’re interested in starting a team, we do ask that you start with the training, and we can probably pair you with someone in your local area that is already working on that as well. And that is a great question.

James – And once you start working with a team that’s already established and learning the process and procedures that are used with CERT, you can build from there and then be walked into the process of how to start a team from the very grassroots up to a very actionable team with a good plan.

Tyler – Another question that I got that I think is really good. I want to say before, each CERT Team is different, so what type of advanced training do you offer your CERT classes?

Missy – In our jurisdiction, we offer CPR, First-Aid. We offer a class on tourniquets, disaster psychology, just to name a few. Our goal is to really provide training that's relevant to our CERTs and that keeps them engaged. How about you?

James – For us, we are along the same lines of sending people to training at FEMA for the CERT Train the Trainer and CERT Program Manager as a start to make a solid foundation. When I first took those courses, that's where I learned how to be better at programming. Dealing with the CERT program side of it. Other advanced classes that we have are the First-Aid and CPR classes. And that's about it.

Tyler – All right, great. So our last question I think we are going to have today, for let's say a business or a workplace, would you bring the CERT Training or CERT class to them? I know you mentioned that before.

Dana – Yes, we absolutely have done that before. Our CERT class, the course is at least 28 hours. We can pare it down to 24. We have taken it to corporate headquarters and taught the class there. We've taught the class here for Fairfax County employees at the government center. So, yes, we do do that. A lot of our instructors who go out into the field are volunteers, so it's all about the availability of our instructors, but we will definitely make that happen. But we need a commitment for three days. We need three full days attendance for them to be certified in CERT. But it has been very popular.

James – Nothing to add on that.

Tyler – All right. Thank you so much everyone for joining us.

Dana – Thank you.

James – Thank you.

Missy – Thanks.

Tyler – I want to thank my wonderful coworkers here for joining in and answering all these questions for us.

Missy – Wouldn't have missed it.

Tyler – If you would like to find out if there is a CERT Team in your area or near you, you can go to the CERT webpage on [FEMA.gov](https://www.fema.gov). There is a link there that will take you right in, and you can search by zip code to see where the closest CERT Teams are to you. Again, I want to thank everyone for joining us and have a wonderful, wonderful weekend. Thanks.

Dana – Thanks.

James – Stay prepared.