

CERT Takes Community Preparedness to China

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) activities continue to grow in popularity across the United States. Last year, CERT volunteers took their record of success to China where they hosted workshops for local officials. China experiences its fair share of natural disasters including landslides, flooding, and earthquakes. Brenda Emrick, Fire Protection Specialist for the City of Costa Mesa, CA, Fire Department, led a group to China where they brought the CERT concept to local instructors.

“This trip was really about finding those master instructors who were identified by the government in Beijing,” said Emrick, who previously visited the country to share preparedness concepts. “We got a much better scope of the project from our previous trips. These last few times have been focused on customizing CERT materials to fit China and its culture.”

In her prior trips, Brenda worked with students and communities to tailor their emergency response needs to the culture. She brought personalized kits along with her. They contained cardboard cutout dolls of family members to practice exercises such as triage, cribbing, and identifying medical treatment areas.

In 2015, Chinese leaders reached out to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to request CERT training for community members. Emrick joined the initial trip because she teaches the CERT Train-the-Trainer course at FEMA’s Emergency Management Institute. With the help of United States Agency for International Development and Asia Foundation grants, the efforts in China continue.

Matt Brisbois, who works as a Life Safety Specialist at the Newport Beach, CA, Fire Department, joined Emrick on this trip. It was his first trip to China teaching the CERT program. Brisbois has been involved with Newport Beach’s CERT for the past 15 years. Emrick initially trained Brisbois in CERT instruction. She felt his skill set would help the CERT mission in China.

“It was exciting for me to go on this trip with Brenda,” said Brisbois. “She was the one who trained me 12 years ago to be a CERT instructor. It was a full circle trip down memory lane going back with her to China doing something she originally taught me how to do.”

Translation devices allowed Emrick and Brisbois to speak with their students almost in real time. Many of the CERT lessons translated easily. However, Emrick and Brisbois faced some cultural nuances in their efforts. They needed to adjust the CERT colors because of cultural issues with the color green.

The CERT instructors often worked long days. Nevertheless, their very engaged students kept them excited.



Trainees in China receive their Community Emergency Response Team certificates.

“For a good 15-20 hours out of the day, they are asking questions. They are excited about what you are going to say and what they are going to learn. They also want you to learn about what they are doing,” said Emrick.

“It’s not every day you are teaching a group of individuals who are giving you their utmost attention. They stay engaged, ask all the right questions, and very much want to take the time to study the curriculum and try to understand it,” said Brisbois. “I definitely see as Brenda continues to go on more trips and introduce it throughout China that the concepts will start to spread pretty rapidly. It will be exciting to see where it goes.”



The Community Emergency Response Team training goes to China.

As far as takeaways from the trip, both Emrick and Brisbois had nothing but positive things to say.

“Every time you do a train the trainer, no matter where you are teaching, you have to meet the need of the person sitting in the room. Plus, you have to ask the right questions to ensure you are giving them the right capabilities,” said Emrick. “That’s how we found out about the green [issue] and some of the other nuances [of Chinese culture].”

“They [Chinese officials] were just wonderful hosts,” said Brisbois. “They could not have been better regarding how they set it up. All the work that the host and the Asia Foundation did for us was really nice and well received.”

Please visit [Costa Mesa Fire and Rescue](#) or the [Newport Beach Fire Department](#) to learn more about their CERT programs.