



COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM
(CERT)

GUIDEBOOK

Vermont CERT Program
Vermont Emergency Management
Department of Public Safety
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INTRODUCTION

Vermont Emergency Management (VEM) has developed this guidance document in an effort to assist local Citizen Corps Councils (CCC) and local CERT Directors to develop and expand their CERT programs.

CERT MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the CERT program is to train citizens to be better prepared to take care of themselves, family, friends, neighbors and/or co-workers in the event of an emergency or disaster that may impact their community until trained emergency first responders arrive.

OVERVIEW

Community Emergency Response Teams are formed by local Citizen Corps Councils which have been identified by the State of Vermont as the Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs). Citizen Corps Councils were created as part of the USA Freedom Corps initiative in 2002 as a result of the terrorist attacks which occurred on 9/11/01. The CERT program was initiated in the State of Vermont in December of 2002. The program continues to grow nationally and within Vermont.

The goal of the CERT program is to train citizens in emergency response skills such as: emergency traffic control, fire safety assistance, light search and rescue and team organization techniques. Using the training obtained in the classroom and during exercises, CERT members are able to assist others in their community during and following an emergency event. CERT members are also encouraged to support emergency first response agencies by taking a more active role in emergency preparedness projects in their communities. All participants taking the CERT Basic Course will be better prepared to react to and cope with the aftermath of a disaster, and provide assistance to their community.

FUNDING AND STRUCTURE OF CERT PROGRAMS IN VERMONT

Funding assistance may be available through your local Citizen Corps Council to start and maintain a CERT.

Team structure will vary depending on a number of different factors, such as location of team membership. Often a team may opt to divide their trained CERT volunteers into sub teams to take advantage of the team membership throughout the various communities within an area, district or region.

BEYOND DISASTER RESPONSE

Roles and Responsibilities of CERT Volunteers:

Initially, CERT programs were developed to assist communities in taking care of themselves in the aftermath of a major disaster when first responders are overwhelmed or unable to respond because of communications or transportation difficulties – “Neighbor Helping Neighbor”. As the CERT concept has taken hold across the country, CERTs have become much more than originally envisioned. CERTs have proven themselves to be an active and vital part of their communities’ **preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation capabilities.**

Each team works with their local CCC and response agencies to determine what activities they will work on. With appropriate training and certification, CERT members may be able to assist with such activities as:

- ⇒ Evacuations, missing person searches and traffic control
- ⇒ Promotion of community awareness of potential hazards and preparedness measures
- ⇒ Supplementing staffing at special events, such as parades and field days
- ⇒ Acting as victims in training exercises
- ⇒ Providing local sheltering operations for the American Red Cross

STARTING A COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

Steps to start a CERT:

- ⇒ Gain approval from the local CCC to create a CERT to meet the needs of the community
- ⇒ Identify and recruit potential attendees and have them complete the CERT Basic Course
- ⇒ Develop a team
- ⇒ Initiate and nominate a CERT Director for appointment by the local CCC

TRAINING

The CERT Basic Course is offered throughout the state several times a year. The training calendar is available at www.dps.state.vt.us/vem/training/ or contact the local CERT Director. The general CERT topics are as follows:

- ⇒ **DISASTER PREPAREDNESS:** Addresses hazards to which people are vulnerable in their community. This unit covers actions that participants and their families take before, during and after a disaster.
- ⇒ **DISASTER FIRE SUPPRESSION:** Briefly covers fire chemistry, hazardous materials, fire hazards, and fire suppression strategies. However, the thrust of this session is the safe use of fire extinguishers, sizing up the situation, controlling utilities, and extinguishing a small fire.
- ⇒ **DISASTER MEDICAL:** Provides an overview of basic first aid and triage.
- ⇒ **LIGHT SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS:** Participants learn about search and rescue planning, size-up, search techniques, rescue techniques, and most important, rescuer safety.
- ⇒ **CERT TEAM ORGANIZATION:** This unit addresses the aspects of the CERT organization and management principles and need for documentation. It will also discuss local and state policy and procedures.
- ⇒ **DISASTER PSYCHOLOGY:** Participants will discuss the signs and symptoms that might be experienced by the disaster victim and worker. Participants will be given strategies on for working in a disaster setting.
- ⇒ **COURSE REVIEW AND DISASTER SIMULATION:** Participants review the course goals and discuss how this training will support their preparedness and their community preparedness. Participants will then participate in a final simulated response exercise using their skills learned.

The CERT Basic Course takes approximately 18 hours to complete and is usually provided during the course of one (1) weekend. Participants are provided with a training manual and any safety equipment or other disaster supplies that will be used during the session.

CERT MEMBERSHIP

Once a person has completed the CERT Basic Course, they should contact their local CERT Director and apply for membership with the local CERT. Membership on a team commits the team member to attend three-quarters of the team's scheduled meetings or as set forth in the team By-Laws, and obligates that the individual is willing to follow through on any appropriate requirements as set forth by the team. CERT membership is open to all people regardless of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. All potential CERT members may be subject to a standard background check.

Membership also necessitates that the team member will be appropriately physically and mentally fit to perform assigned duties during any emergency or non-emergency activation.

A Standard CERT Member Kit and two (2) photo identification badges will be presented to each new team member following completion of the CERT Basic Course, submittal of a signed Code of Conduct form, the Volunteer Information Form and after a probationary period as set forth in the team By-Laws; during which each new team member must attend at least one (1) official team meeting.

Conduct of Vermont CERT volunteers reflects on their organization, the requesting organization they are assisting and the State of Vermont. All Vermont CERT volunteers shall uphold the following standards of behavior and conduct at all times:

- ⇒ Deploy only according to Vermont's official "Citizen Corps Program Activation Protocol"
- ⇒ Follow the Incident Command System and Chain of Command; comply with standard operating procedures
- ⇒ Employ professional courtesy
- ⇒ Uphold and respect leadership and the law
- ⇒ Be honest, impartial and fair in performing all duties
- ⇒ Maintain open and honest communication; and when in doubt, ask for clarification
- ⇒ Maintain self-discipline and a professional work ethic; seek to achieve high standards of performance and responsiveness in serving the community
- ⇒ Perform all duties with diligence, care and attention to contribute to a safe working environment for all
- ⇒ Uphold responsibility and accountability for individual and team actions
- ⇒ Respect the confidentiality, integrity and dignity of all persons and treat those in need of emergency or disaster management services with compassion and sensitivity
- ⇒ Be respectful of the diverse cultures of all; being tolerant of the views and ideas of others
- ⇒ Only perform duties in which one is qualified to perform and do so in a safe manner
- ⇒ Maintain state-issued team supplies and equipment properly and ensure that all team assets and equipment are well-maintained and used economically for approved purposes only
- ⇒ CERT-labeled clothing will only be worn during official team meetings, trainings or activations/deployments (CERT-labeled hats and shirts only may be worn in public any time the opportunity for advertising CERT is available)
- ⇒ Individual team volunteers shall not accept any gift or benefit offered in connection with their duties as a CERT volunteer
- ⇒ Harassment or discrimination of any kind is prohibited
- ⇒ Use of illegal drugs and misuse of over-the-counter medications is strictly prohibited
- ⇒ Consumption of alcohol during official team meetings, trainings and activations/deployments is prohibited

Failure to comply with these codes of conduct may result in termination from the team. In the event that disciplinary action against a team member ensues as a result of a breach in this signed agreement, the local CCC Chair, local CERT Director and VEM will work together to resolve the situation. If any individual is asked to withdraw as a CERT member, then all supplies issued to that member must be returned to their CERT Director within 30 days of resolution.

CERT MEETINGS

Each CERT must meet a minimum of six (6) times per year and at least half of these meetings should include workshop or classroom training to reflect the continued education needs of the team for response. This will allow for development of CERT team members in various areas of expertise.

CERT meeting minutes and attendance rosters shall be provided to the local CCC during the next scheduled CCC meeting.

CERT PROGRAM DIRECTOR RESPONSIBILITIES

The appointment of a CERT Director shall be made on an annual basis by the local CCC. Nominations may come from the CERT. A CERT Director may resign or be removed from the position by the CCC at any time. The individual appointed to fill such a vacancy shall be appointed for the remaining portion of the term.

- ⇒ Recruit potential team members and develop a leadership contingent upon, and as defined in, the team By-Laws to include but not be limited to:
 - Deputy Director (2nd in command of the team)
 - Training Coordinator
 - Supply Coordinator
 - Scribe
 - Others as needed
 - ⇒ Coordinate the preparation of team By-Laws (utilizing the state's standard template)
 - ⇒ Designate a delegate from the CERT to act as a representative to the CCC
 - ⇒ Promote team attendance at CCC meetings in order to network with local, state and federal agencies and be prepared to report out on team activities (i.e. trainings, activations, member information, issues, needs, etc.)
 - ⇒ Schedule and promote regular team meetings to discuss training and community involvement and distribute such schedule to:
 - The state CCP Coordinator at VEM; and
 - The local CCC
 - ⇒ Conduct meetings, workshops or pre-approved trainings and ensure meeting minutes and attendance rosters that will be provided to the respective local CCC during the next scheduled CCC meeting
 - ⇒ Assure all member information is sent to the state CCP Coordinator for input into the state system
 - Membership information for each team member to include:
 - Completed Volunteer Information form
 - Signed Code of Conduct form
 - Signed and authorized Member Acceptance and Supply Distribution forms for receipt of the Standard CERT Member Kit
 - Current head shot photo accepted in jpeg format ONLY (compile photos on CD and mail or send via email)
 - ⇒ Work directly with the applicable CCC on personnel issues
 - Code of Conduct concerns
 - Collection of CERT Member Kit supplies if membership is terminated
 - Other personnel issues of concern
- * If additional guidance is needed, VEM may be consulted on such matters*

ACTIVATION AND DEPLOYMENT OF CERT

Vermont Emergency Management has developed activation protocols. CERTs are required to follow these protocols in order to be protected under Title 20 VSA during any emergency or non-emergency activation, promotional activities/events, monthly meetings and trainings. When deployed by proper authority, CERTs can compliment and enhance response capabilities within their neighborhoods, communities and workplaces. The final approval for response in order to be protected under Title 20 VSA will come through calling the VEM Duty Officer at 1(800) 347-0488. When followed, the activation protocol will ensure volunteer protection through the State of Vermont.

For non-emergency CERT response or assistance, VEM should be notified at least 48 hours before the event. A CERT volunteer acting on their own does not have any authority beyond serving as a Good Samaritan and will not represent him/herself as CERT or wear or use CERT equipment.

CERTs are not intended to replace a community's first response capability, but rather to serve as a supplement to it. CERT's must keep their own safety in mind as their first priority. CERT's must know their capabilities and the limitations of their training and equipment and work within those limitations.

Keep in mind CERT volunteers **do not**: suppress large fires, enter structures that they consider heavily damaged and dangerous, perform hazardous materials cleanup or respond to incidents involving radiological, chemical, or biological agents, perform medical, fire, or search and rescue operations beyond their level of training, perform law enforcement functions or deploy unless called for by proper authority.

PROTOCOL FOR ACTIVATION OF VERMONT CERTs

- A. Any **Incident Commander of a First Responder Organization** (*Law Enforcement, Fire, Rescue or American Red Cross all acceptable*), or **Local Emergency Management Director** (*who must be a recognized agent of a town*) within Vermont may request activation of an established and registered Citizen Corps Program Team via Vermont Emergency Management to the level of its training
- B. Before team activation and response, the following communication will be needed with the State:
 - a. Emergency Activation
 - § An Incident Commander of a First Responder Organization or Local Emergency Management Director may contact the Vermont Emergency Management (VEM) Duty Officer at: 1(800) 347-0488 to request emergency activation of a Citizen Corps Program Team and shall provide:
 - Incident Command information (including name of agency requesting assistance, contact name[s] and phone number[s])
 - Team assignment information
 - **Volunteers are not protected under Title 20 VSA if this call is not made**
 - § When requested to activate a Citizen Corps Program Team, a representative from VEM (or if after hours, the VEM Duty Officer) will:
 - Using the Contact List provided by each Team Director, call the team to activate (or instruct the requesting entity to do so); and
 - Provide the Primary Team Point of Contact with the following information (or instruct the requesting entity to do so):
 - Location of response
 - Level of training needed for response
 - Timeline needed to activate a team in order to respond to the request
 - Incident Command contact person and number from local First Responder

- Agency or Local Emergency Management office requesting assistance at the event site
 - VEM contact person to call back once team is assembled
 - § The CCP Point of Contact will then initiate team callouts & provide team assignments under the direction of the Incident Commander or their designee
 - b. Non-Emergency Activation – Events Overseen by a First Responder Agency, Local Emergency Management Director or appropriate representative from a pre-approved State Departmental or Agency
 - § First Responder Agencies, Local Emergency Management Directors and State Departments or Agencies can request this type of activation
 - § The Citizen Corps Program Director must forward an email notification from the appropriate entity requesting assistance **no later than 48 hours prior to the activation** to the VEM Duty Officer, accompanied by the following information:
 - Political subdivision requesting activation (Command & Control entity)
 - Event request date, time, duration & location
 - Who will be responding (if this information is not yet determined, send when available)
 - Any other information you feel is important to the activation
 - **Ensure a confirming email reply is received from VEM formally activating your team prior to formal activation of team members**
 - **Volunteers are not protected under Title 20 VSA if this email is not received and confirmed**
 - § Initiate your team callouts & provide team assignments
 - c. Promotional or Training Activities and Monthly Meetings
 - § These types of team activities do not require a formal activation; however, the Team Director shall send the VEM Citizen Corps Program Coordinator a confirming email with the date, time and description of the activity **and** shall receive a confirming email from VEM acknowledging the occurrence of the activity
 - **Volunteers are not protected under Title 20 if this email is not received and confirmed**
- C. Point of Contact will be (*per Vermont Citizen Corps Program Bylaws for Operation*):
- a. Team Director
 - b. Team Deputy Director
 - c. Team Training Coordinator
- D. Information needed for all Team Assignments:
- a. Determine what is needed for Team Assignment and if the team is qualified
 - b. Determine how many people are needed
 - c. Determine the location of the staging area or other location that Team should report to
 - d. Determine who the team will report to (*1st Responder Agency or Local Emergency Management Incident Commander*)
 - e. Call back number and contact name of requesting entity if more information is needed
- E. Call out may be via the Vermont Emergency Response Volunteer (VERV) network or according to team protocol, with callouts proceeding until all applicable contacts on the list have been reached and the goals of the activation are achieved

Pertinent Rules to Follow (if your team is activated):

- a. Teams will not self-activate at any time
- b. The activated Team will consist of the appropriate number of members trained to the level of their activation

- c. The first Team Member to arrive at the Incident Location will be responsible for recording the names and times of arrival of his/her Team members until the designated Team Leader is established
- d. Once the Team has assembled, the designated Team Leader will report to the On-Scene Incident Commander (or their designee) to receive an assignment and be the team Point of Contact to the On-Scene Incident Commander
- e. A representative from the local First Responder Agency (Incident Commander) or Local Emergency Management Director must be **physically present** (visually and / or within radio contact on the ground at the incident site) at all emergency and / or non-emergency sites during a Citizen Corps Program activation to provide a Command and Control Structure
- f. Team Leaders are responsible for the mission and safety of their units, and will assign roles and record these assignments, receive a designation to the unit for use in the Incident Command System and record all appropriate information needed (or designate appropriate personnel to do so)
- g. Team Members will report to their Team Leader any problems or decisions that cannot be made in the field to which they are assigned
- h. On completion of initial assignment, the team will report to the Incident Staging Area for further assignment or release
- i. Upon demobilization of assignment(s), each Team Leader will account for all other Team Members and collect all documentation
- j. Any team member encountering a loss of or damage to their assigned personal equipment while on activation assignment shall report this to the Team Leader
- k. Any team member who becomes injured while on activation assignment must fill out a Report of First Injury form and submit it to the Team Leader prior to the team debrief, before the incident closes
- l. All teams will debrief as a complete unit before release
- m. After activation and response are complete, the Team Leader should complete an Incident Response / After Action report, and then email this to the VEM Duty Officer, with a copy to the VEM Citizen Corps Program Coordinator, Local Citizen Corps Council Chair and the team members who responded during the activation.

All CERT's responding to emergency and non-emergency events should wear their CERT identifying gear (i.e. CERT shirt, sturdy footwear, CERT vest, all weather gear if needed and any other equipment packs as needed and directed by CERT leadership). No combination of other volunteer organizations or for-profit organizations gear or clothing may be worn.

PROMOTIONAL EVENT PROCEDURES

Promotional activities and events conducted within the State of Vermont by Citizen Corps Program teams are not considered activations; therefore, they are not required to follow a formal activation process. However, certain procedures must be completed in order for all involved persons to be covered under the state's insurance policy and in the event that certain pre-approved expenses will be requested for reimbursement following the activity. This protocol is necessary in order to comply with state and federal regulations and guidelines.

Communication with Vermont Emergency Management:

In order to be protected under Title 20 VSA, and, in order to become eligible for expense reimbursements which are incurred during the activity, the Citizen Corps Program (CCP) Team Director is required to send the State Citizen Corps Program Coordinator at VEM a confirming email with the date, time, description of the activity, and a summary of projected expenses **and** should receive a confirming email from VEM acknowledging the occurrence of the activity at least 48 hours in advance.

Promotional Documentation:

Pamphlet and/or Advertisement

Prior to a promotional event, either a promotional brochure or pamphlet should be created and distributed widely throughout the community (describing the applicable program and outreach objectives) and/or advertised in a local paper, via public service announcement or via an established website.

Agenda/Schedule of Events

If possible, the CCP team should draft an agenda or a schedule of events for the promotional activity. If food will be provided to volunteer team members, then this documentation should specify "working breakfast, lunch or dinner" somewhere within.

Pictures

Pictures of the promotional activity, booth and volunteers are requested for submission to VEM in order to further document the activity or event.

Roster

Any CCP team volunteers who participate in a pre-approved promotional activity or event must sign a roster indicating the date, time and description of the activity.

All promotional brochures, copies of advertisement announcements, agenda, pictures and completed roster **must** be submitted to the State Citizen Corps Program Coordinator at VEM if expenses are to be requested for reimbursement in relation to the promotional activity.

Allowable Expenses for Reimbursement:

A summary of projected expenses must be submitted to the State Citizen Corps Program Coordinator at VEM **prior** to the event.

The following types of expenses are allowable for reimbursement, but costs must remain reasonable and are subject to further approval by VEM:

- Printing costs for public education and outreach materials, which:
 - Increase citizen preparedness
 - Promote training, exercise and volunteer opportunities
 - Inform the public about emergency plans, evacuation routes, shelter locations and systems for public alerts/warnings
- Advertising costs, including but not limited to:

- Public service announcements
- Camera-ready materials
- Website support costs
- Newsletters
- Mileage incurred to and from the event:
 - For established CCP team members only
 - Only one person per household is allowed to submit mileage reimbursement for the same event
 - At the prevailing federal approved rate
- Meals expenses:
 - At State of Vermont per diem meal reimbursement rates
 - For more information visit:
(http://humanresources.vermont.gov/benefits/compensation/expense_reimbursement_rates)
 - These expenses are reserved for team members who volunteered at the promotional event and must be submitted by the CCP Director or designee
 - In order for these expenses to be reimbursed, they must be accompanied by a fully-signed roster of CCP team members who volunteered at the activity/event
 - Receipt copies must be attached to the reimbursement request form

Any expenses not included above should be addressed with the State Citizen Corps Program Coordinator **prior** to the event to determine allowability. Additionally, all materials produced for distribution must include the national or jurisdiction's CCP logo, tagline and website and comply with logo standards. (See: https://www.citizencorps.gov/pdf/logo_guide.pdf)

Reimbursement Process:

- When submitting allowable expenses for reimbursement to VEM, non-state employees are required to use a State of Vermont Personal Claim Expense Form (available upon request through VEM). It is imperative that this form is filled out completely and accurately

Once completed, the form and all necessary documentation should be mailed to the State Citizen Corps Program Coordinator at VEM for review and approval. Unless there are specific issues with a reimbursement request, paperwork will be submitted for payment processing within five (5) business days of receipt at VEM.