



4-H Teen CERT

Involving Youth in Community Emergency Response Teams

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Introduction

Disaster situations can affect thousands of individuals every year across the United States. First responders are often pushed to the limit when planning for, and responding to, disasters (National Preparedness Guidelines, 2007). Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) are local citizens who are trained under approved Department of Homeland Security (DHS) curriculum to assist first responders in a disaster (Citizen Corp, 2011). Traditionally CERT teams are comprised of adult members. However, youth also have important roles they can play to help ensure that disaster planning is optimized and information resources are available to communities. The 4-H Teen CERT program follows the Adult CERT curriculum, with modifications for adolescent-appropriate activities. Working alongside emergency management personnel, trained teens can assist agencies in educating communities about disasters as well as responding when they occur. In April 2011, five Nevada youth/adult teams attended intensive two-day training, designed to teach strategies that would help them educate their respective communities about community involvement and civic engagement in the realm of disaster preparedness.

CERT beginnings

The CERT concept was first developed by the Los Angeles City Fire Department (LAFD) in 1985. Subsequent natural disasters reinforced the need for a trained citizenry who could meet immediate local needs and provide support to the limited number of first responders (Citizen Corp, 2011). Known as CERT members, these volunteers learn about disaster preparedness for hazards that affect their community. In addition, they practice basic disaster response skills such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization and disaster medical operations. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) a division of DHS, supports CERT train-the-trainer workshops for responder agencies to encourage the development of local CERT programs. These local, community-based groups are prepared to care for disaster victims and educate communities about preparedness tactics. Following the 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States, President George W. Bush requested the aid of all Americans to help safeguard our country. CERT programs provide appropriate citizen emergency response training to accomplish that request. Though some people feel it is impossible to be prepared for unexpected events, the truth is that

taking preparedness actions helps people deal with disasters much more effectively when they do occur (FEMA, 2009).



Churchill County 4-H Teen CERT Search and Rescue Team

Importance of Youth Emergency Preparedness Education

The concept of involving youth in emergency education is not specific to the 4-H CERT program. Youth serving organizations such as Boy Scouts of America and Girls Scouts of the USA provide disaster education as part of their respective merit badge and merit patch programs. Health Occupations Students Association of America (HOSA) recognizes Emergency Preparedness as an important training for their youth who are enrolled in high school health courses. HOSA provides competitions in Emergency Preparedness related topics statewide and nationally (Health Occupations Students Association of America, 2011).

In 2007, the award-winning Alert, Evacuate and Shelter Program (AES) identified and trained youth and adult teams to use geospatial technology to enhance local community emergency preparedness efforts. Working with community leaders, emergency management, and geospatial technology experts, AES teams created evacuation route and shelter site maps in

hurricane-ridden counties in the southeastern United States and the District of Columbia. One component of the AES training was to showcase opportunities for further community involvement in disaster education and preparedness. The national CERT program was one program highlighted during these AES trainings.

A one-year, post-training evaluation reported a statistically significant increase in the awareness of the national CERT program. Some participants even reported that they were now involved in their local CERT programs, focusing on the roles youth play in community emergency preparedness activities in a Teen CERT program (Powell, et al., 2009).

Overview of Nevada 4-H Teen CERT Training

The Nevada 4-H Teen CERT training was conducted at the Churchill County High School in collaboration with the HOSA advisor and health occupations instructor. The first day began with team building activities designed to not only acquaint participants with each other, but to simulate the chaotic nature of disaster response. Youth and adults were asked to evaluate their knowledge of emergency preparedness strategies and the importance of pre-planning. Instruction included topics such as Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation, Utility Management and Hazard Materials, External Search and Cribbing, Patient Movement, Disaster First Aid, and Disaster Psychology. Classes included a combination of lecture and hands-on activities.

The second day of training continued with additional team building activities and a module on Communication and the Incident Command System (ICS). A final exercise allowed teams to use their newly acquired skills to respond to a mock earthquake disaster. Teams conducted search and

rescue activities, triage, transport and medical first aid. Youth, adults and instructors then debriefed the exercise, reinforcing CERT concepts. An additional goal of the training was to assist teams in developing project plans for emergency preparedness education in their own communities. Teams decided to develop

relationships with their local emergency responders and community agencies to further their own knowledge about local disaster preparedness. In addition, teams began educating residents, also focusing on elementary age youth, teaching them about the importance of knowing what to do in an emergency.

Agenda for Two-Day 4-H Teen CERT Training

DAY ONE
Unit One – Disaster Preparedness Disaster Awareness, Preparing for a Disaster, Family Emergency Plans, Disaster Supply Kits
Unit Two – Hazard Management Familiarization of Utilities, Using Fire Extinguishers, Hazardous Materials
Unit Three – Search and Rescue Building Size-up, Hazard Awareness, Search, Patient Transport, Cribbing
Unit Four - Disaster First Aid Triage, Treatment, Emotional First Aid, Moulage
Unit Five – Terrorism & Animals Observation Skills, Dealing with Animals

DAY TWO
Unit Six – Teamwork Incident Command Organization Leadership Communication
Final Exercise Earthquake Disaster Scenario Debriefing
Community Project Plans Sharing of plans, team discussion

Summary

Disasters affect youth as well as adults. Oftentimes adults are not present when a disaster occurs, requiring that youth be able to take appropriate measures to stay safe. Being prepared in advance of an emergency helps people deal with the situation much more effectively when it does occur. Current youth-serving organizations have shown that age-appropriate emergency preparedness education is beneficial for youth, families and communities. CERT training, approved by the DHS as valuable disaster education for communities, is one example of how individuals can be prepared or prepare for a disaster. The 4-H Teen CERT curriculum, offered in a train-the-trainer format, is designed to follow the national CERT program, with modifications to make it effective for older teens.

For further information about the 4-H Teen CERT program and to learn how you can start training, please contact publication authors: Pamela Powell, powellp@unce.unr.edu, Lynette Black, Black.Lynette@oregonstate.edu, or Marilyn Smith, smithm@unce.unr.edu



Team Building Exercise

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