

City Council Approves organization of CERT or; *Community Emergency Response Team*

Ham Lake recently approved the implementation of CERT in an effort to prepare a community-based preparedness plan that allows us to prepare and respond to disruptions and potential hazards following disasters such as tornadoes, thunderstorms, flooding and manmade technological events such as explosions, hazardous materials accidents and even civil unrest. Neighborhood preparedness will enhance the ability of individuals and communities to reduce their emergency needs and to manage their existing resources until professional assistance becomes available.

Studies have shown that groups working together perform effectively if there has been prior training and planning for disaster response. Effective response requires comprehensive planning and coordination of all who will be involved such as government, volunteer groups, businesses, schools and community organizations. Damaged roads and disrupted communications may restrict access of emergency response agencies into critically affected areas, often for days, forcing individual households and neighborhoods to rely on their own resources for food, water and shelter.

How CERTS Operate

As CERTs are organized and trained, meeting locations or staging areas are identified and this is where the fire department, public works, law enforcement and other services will interact with CERTs. These may be fire department buildings, public works buildings, city hall, etc. Equipment and supplies will be staged in these areas as well as utility trailers that can be brought to the location. CERTs provide an effective first response capability. Acting as individuals first, then as team members, trained CERT volunteers can fan out within their assigned areas fighting small fires, shutting off natural gas at damaged homes and performing light search and rescue and first aid.

Basic Training

Following a catastrophic disaster, you and your community may be isolated for an extended period for a myriad of reasons, including the size of the area affected, in-op communications systems, or impassable roads. Training prepares you to help yourself and others because emergency services may not be available. You can make a difference by using your CERT training to save lives and protect property. CERT training requires you to take care of yourself and your family first, then your neighbors and if all is well, to then scramble to your staging area to help others.

I'm a busy person. Can I make a difference?

YES! Your level of commitment, no matter how large or small, will benefit your neighborhood. Maybe you just sign up to be muscle when trees are down. Perhaps you sign up and let leaders know that you have a 4X4 pickup or a skid steer and a chainsaw. Great! Maybe you are trained

in first aid or are already a first responder. Fantastic! We'll need neighborhood leaders and group leaders also. Training will be available at many levels. Just choose what you're willing to do. FEMA has already put together a comprehensive training program and syllabus for us to tap into. Formal training along with comprehensive drills a couple of times a year will prepare our city for the worst.

Getting Started

This is going to take some time to implement. We need to divide the city into groups and then neighborhoods for organizational purposes. We need to recruit and train citizens. We need to work with the many agencies in concert for training and deployment. If you are unable to volunteer, remember to prepare yourselves. Have an emergency food supply. Keep a comprehensive medical kit in your home. Get a generator even if it just means plugging your refrigerator and some lights in. Put together a "Bug Out Bag" in case you need to leave the area. Have an alternate shelter planned out ahead of time. Maybe your cabin or a relative's house, etc. Have some emergency fuel in your garage. Get self-defense and/or weapons training. Keep an open mind. Look at how fast things have changed just since March.

There will be more information coming in the future. Neighborhood Watch leaders, you may be hearing from us soon. We will be working on sign up and training schedules and will eventually have them on the city website in the future. I'll leave you with the proverb that was taught to me day one in the Marine Corps; Better to have and not need than the alternative. Semper Fi. Carry on!

If you are interested in joining CERT, please send an email to info@ci.ham-lake.mn.us with your name, address and phone number and we will contact you with more information in the future.