

CERT Cowley County

No matter how big or how small a disaster is, it is still a local event. Following a major disaster, first responders who provide fire and medical services may not be able to meet the demand for those services. Factors such as failed communications, high water, and road blockage may contribute to emergency responders being unable to reach victims during a disaster. The citizens of Cowley County are learning to rely on each other to meet their immediate emergency needs.

During an emergency or disaster, the reality is that ordinary citizens are the first to arrive at that scene 95% of the time. Do you know what you would do? During times of crisis, everyone wants to help and spontaneous volunteers can be overwhelming.

Cowley County is prone to severe weather events such as floods and tornadoes. While floods are generally predicted and crews are given several days notice, tornadoes are quick to strike with a potential of 30-45 minutes head notice. Cowley County Emergency Management has made it a priority to train citizens, families, employees, etc. how to respond to disastrous events and to work as a team to help our neighbors and communities. Through planning, training and pre-event coordination, CERT Cowley County is working to prepare themselves and others to do just that.

CERT training provides citizens with information on preparedness, classroom training, hands-on practice and organizational skills to help the citizens of Cowley County until first responders are available.

CERT Background

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) concept was developed and implemented by the City of Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) in 1985. They recognized that citizens would very likely be on their own during the early stages of a catastrophic disaster. The LAFD decided that some basic training in disaster survival and rescue skills would improve the ability of citizens to survive until first responders or other assistance could arrive.

The training program that the LAFD initiated proved to be so beneficial that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) felt that the concept and the program should be available to communities nationwide. In 1994, the Emergency Management Institute (EMI) expanded the CERT materials to make them applicable to all hazards.

CERT Cowley County Background

In January of 2003, the President asked that all Americans volunteer in service of their country. In turn, the Citizen Corps was created to spearhead this endeavor and to assist and to recruit the power of individuals through education, training, and volunteer service; and to make communities safer, stronger and better prepared to respond to natural, man-made and technological hazards.

In August of 2003, the Cowley County Local Emergency Planning Committee agreed to take on the role as the Cowley County Citizen Corps. From that, CERT Cowley County was established.

The first training class in Cowley County was completed in January 2004. That class boasted nine graduates. From that time, a total of 82 CERT members are trained in Cowley County.

CERT Cowley County has taken a lead role in the State of Kansas and had the honor of being the first rural CERT program. Many other programs across the State have turned to CERT Cowley County for guidance in beginning their own programs.

CERT Cowley County meets on a regular basis – 2nd Tuesday of every month at 6:30pm in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Winfield.

Course Description

The CERT courses are delivered in Cowley County by first responders from Cowley County. All instructors are knowledgeable and skilled in their respective fields.

The CERT class consists of 24-hours of training. Typically, the classes are given in three hour sessions, two nights per week, for four weeks. However, other arrangements can be made to accommodate a specific group's needs.

Unit 1: Disaster Preparedness – This unit addresses local hazards within our communities. It covers the actions that students and their families need to take before, during and after a disaster. The students will begin to learn how they can progress from being citizens to that of disaster workers. CERT members are trained to take care of themselves, their family, their neighbors and then their community – in that order. This session explains the rationale behind that objective and helps the students to react in a safe and appropriate manner. The CERT concept and applicable laws covering volunteers is also covered in this section.

Unit 2: Fire Safety – This unit covers basic fire chemistry, hazardous materials, fire hazards and fire suppression strategies. However, the focus is the safe use of fire extinguishers, sizing up a situation and extinguishing small fires.

Unit 3: Disaster Medical Operations, Part 1 – In this unit, participants learn about the three major killers. They get to practice diagnosing and treating airway obstructions, bleeding and shock by using simple triage and rapid treatment techniques (START).

Unit 4: Disaster Medical Operations, Part 2 – This unit covers evaluating patients by doing a head to toe assessment, establishing a medical treatment area, performing basic first aid and practicing in a safe and sanitary manner.

Unit 5: Light Search and Rescue Operations – Participants learn about search and rescue planning, size-up, search techniques, rescue techniques and most important – rescuer safety.

Unit 6: CERT Organization – Covers organization and management principles of CERTs through use of the Incident Command System (ICS) and the need for documentation.

Unit 7: Disaster Psychology – Covers the signs and symptoms that might be experienced by either disaster victims or workers.

Unit 8: Terrorism and CERT – This final classroom session has a brief overview of terrorism and then goes directly into other areas such as a brief overview of the Emergency Response Guidebook. This class includes a special video of the events of 9/11 that was created by one of our own CERT members and a member of a local fire department. Special visitors from the Cowley County Citizen Corps and the City-County Health Department are also present.

Unit 9: Final Exercise/Drill – During this session, all participants get a chance to take all of the information they acquired and put it to work in a full-scale, hands-on exercise.

Conclusion

CERT training is useful and beneficial to anyone in the community, including individuals, families, business employees etc. If you are interested in learning more for yourself or to volunteer for your community, the CERT program is available.

For more information on CERT, please contact Brian Stone, Cowley County Emergency Management Coordinator at (620) 221-0470, (620) 441-4569 (from Ark City) or email at emergencymanagement@cowleycounty.org.