



Service

## Become a CERT volunteer

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training class training and volunteer program offers members of the public an opportunity to learn basic hands-on disaster response techniques. The program is a 20-hour class that covers:

- Disaster preparedness
- Fire safety
- Light search and rescue
- Team organization
- Disaster psychology
- Terrorism response
- Disaster medical operations

Upon completion of the class, participants have the option to become a Chicago Citizen Corps CERT volunteer and assist professional emergency services following a disaster. Past participants have played a role in emergency exercises and assisted the City during the recovery and evacuee welcome efforts after Hurricane Katrina.

The training is free to participants, and funded by the Department of Homeland Security.

CCEMC holds two training sessions per year, and in 2011 we intend to host up to 4 sessions in cooperation with the Chicago Police Department.

Is your organization interested in starting their own CERT program within the City of Chicago? If so, we'd love to help. Please contact the email address below for more details.

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## Residents train to help first responders during city disasters

BY FRANK MAIN

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A tornado hits Englewood.

Dozens of homes are destroyed.

Firefighters, paramedics and police officers race to the wreckage.

But they need help assessing casualties and property damage.

That's where the Community Emergency Response Team comes in.

Since 2004, more than 350 citizens — everyone from lawyers to teachers to civil engineers — have graduated from a 20-hour course that trains them to serve as the eyes and ears of Chicago's first responders. The team hasn't been called to duty in a disaster yet, but its members have helped in city evacuation drills.

The course is taught by the city's Office of Emergency Management and Communications and the Chicago Police Department.

Last month at the Chicago Fire Academy, 20 students were told not to enter buildings with catastrophic damage or attempt to fight major blazes. "Still, there's a lot you can do," said one trainer, Thomas Henkey, of OEMC.

In a parking lot, the students learned how to use a fire extinguisher to put out small fires. They were told to work with a buddy who can watch for danger as the person in front uses the extinguisher. And the class learned about the "fire triangle" — the oxygen, fuel and heat that all must be present for a fire to flourish. "Kick out one of its legs and it dies," said Matthew Doughtie,

another OEMC trainer.

They were warned not to enter a situation that would require a first responder to rescue them.

“We free up a firefighter or a cop. So don’t become the victim yourself,” Henkey said.

Nationally, there’s one firefighter for every 280 people, one police officer for every 385 people and one EMT/paramedic for every 325 people, the trainers said.

Soon, the volunteers headed out into a parking lot to fight a mock fire — in the form of orange traffic cones. One volunteer aimed too high and Henkey yelled: “Spray the base!”

Another volunteer, Melva Pratt, got it right on her first try. Pratt, a teacher at the Barbara Sizemore Academy in the 6300 block of South Hermitage, said she’s providing her school and mosque with the information she’s learning.

“In Hurricane Katrina, it was a long time before the first responders could help the people. We want to try to sustain the community until they get there. There’s power in numbers,” she said.

The course is popular. Civil engineer Tessa Colbrese tried to join in the fall but had to wait until this spring.

Last week, the students had their final exam — a mock search-and-rescue of tornado victims. They were told to search a single-family home. Then the instructors threw a curve ball: A mother ran up and said her baby was trapped in the apartment building next door. But the students didn’t panic.

Fifty-one of them graduated after the exercise — the largest class so far.