



# SURVIVING THE STORM: THE DISASTER DEFENSE DIGEST

## Monthly Safety Message:

### CERT Training for Crisis Response: Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Community Emergency Response Team training is one of the most powerful ways for everyday people to prepare for crisis. CERT brings neighbors into the same room to learn basic disaster skills together. Participants practice light search and rescue, simple medical aid, fire safety, and how to safely size up a scene before rushing in. Just as important, they learn how to work as a calm, organized team instead of a group of scared individuals.

The training is very practical. You practice lifting safely, carrying someone with a partner, and using items you already have at home. You also learn how to check on vulnerable neighbors, support elders, and communicate clearly with first responders. For many people, CERT turns fear into confidence. It reminds us that we are not helpless in the face of fire, flood, or severe weather. We can prepare together, and when we do, our entire community becomes



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## Dignity in the Dark: How Crisis Teams Protect What Matters Most

When disaster strikes, most of us do not remember the forms, the plans, or the fancy titles. We remember faces. We remember who showed up, who stayed calm when everything felt shaky, and who kept checking on the people who were quiet in the corner. That is the heart of crisis team building. It is not just structure and roles. It is people caring for people in very hard moments.

A strong crisis team is built long before the sirens start. It begins with simple questions: Who do people already turn to when they are worried. Who knows the elders. Who knows the parents. Who knows the workers on the night shift. Sometimes these natural helpers are not the ones with official titles, yet they are often the backbone of a response.

Training matters, but it needs to feel real. Tabletop exercises are useful, yet the most powerful moments come when team members share stories. A paramedic talking about the call that stayed in their mind. A shelter lead sharing how it feels to tell someone there are no more beds. These stories help the team understand each other, and they build trust in a way that checklists never will.

Clear roles are still important. In a crisis,

people need to know who is coordinating information, who is speaking to the media, who is checking on staff, and who is tracking supplies. But roles should not turn people into robots. The best crisis teams leave room for humanity. If someone looks exhausted, there should be permission to tap them out and rotate another person in. If a team member needs five minutes to breathe and cry, that is not weakness. That is basic emotional safety.

Communication is another key piece. Good crisis teams practice how to share bad news in honest, plain language. They learn how to say “I do not know yet, but I will find out” without shame. They commit to telling staff and community members the truth as they know it, even when that truth is uncomfortable.

Finally, crisis team building is not a one-time event. It is a living practice. After each incident, the team should sit together and ask: What worked? What hurt? Who did we forget to include? Then they adjust, not to blame, but to grow.

In the end, an effective crisis team is not only a group that manages disaster. It is a circle of people who protect dignity, even on the hardest day.

## Quick Tip:

### Need CERT and Crisis Team Training?

CAL TERRA offers CERT and crisis response team training that is tailored to the character and culture of your community. Our trainers focus on practical skills, clear communication, and emotional care, not just technical steps. Sessions can include tabletop exercises, field drills, and gentle space for questions and reflection.

For tribal communities and rural towns, CAL TERRA can weave in local history, traditional knowledge, and the realities of limited resources.

Partnering with CAL TERRA means your CERT volunteers and crisis team members are not learning from a generic manual. Instead, they are learning from people who understand what it is like to evacuate elders, support families in shelters, and rebuild trust after hard events.

To inquire about training opportunities, you can:

- Call the CAL TERRA office at (559) 478-6022 to speak with one of our trainers about your training needs.

- Email the CAL TERRA training team at [info@calterra.org](mailto:info@calterra.org)

For more information, visit: [www.calterra.org](http://www.calterra.org)

## Lanterns in the Storm: How Crisis Teams Light the Way

A strong crisis response team is not just a group of people with badges and titles. It is a circle of neighbors who have chosen to show up for their community on its hardest days. When we talk about elements and success factors, we are really talking about the qualities that help people feel seen, heard, and safe when everything else feels uncertain.

First, a strong crisis team is built on trust. Community members need to know that the people leading them in an emergency are honest and dependable. This trust does not appear overnight. It grows through regular presence at meetings, cultural events, and everyday conversations. When team members are familiar faces at community gatherings, it is easier to listen to them in a fire, flood, or public safety threat.

Second, clear roles are essential. In a crisis, confusion can be dangerous. A successful team knows who is coordinating information, who is talking to elders, who is checking on families with children, who is supporting people with disabilities, and who is communicating with outside agencies. When everyone knows their job, they can move with more confidence and less panic.

Third, communication with the community must be respectful and real. People can feel when they are being managed instead of respected. Strong crisis teams share what they know, say when they do not have all the answers yet, and avoid rumors. They use plain language instead of technical jargon. They remember that each announcement lands on people who might be scared for their homes, their relatives, or their pets.

Another success factor is emotional



support. Crisis work is heavy. Team members are often hearing difficult stories, witnessing grief, or juggling their own worries about family while helping others. Healthy teams make space to check on each other, to rest, and to ask for help. This is not weakness. It is an act of protection that keeps the team able to serve over the long term.

Cultural awareness is also key. Every community has its own values, spiritual practices, and ways of coping with loss. The strongest crisis teams listen to cultural leaders and invite them into planning and response. They respect ceremonies, traditional knowledge, and community decision making.

Finally, learning together after an event is vital. Once the immediate danger passes and people have had a moment to breathe, the team gathers with community members to ask what went well, what was painful, and what was confusing. Elders, youth, parents, and frontline workers all have something to teach. By listening carefully and writing down lessons while they are still fresh, the team turns a hard experience into wisdom that can guide the next response.

At its core, a strong crisis response team is a promise the community makes to itself. It says, in the middle of fear and confusion, you are not alone. We will show up for you. We will tell you the truth. We will protect your dignity. We will listen when you say something is not working. We will keep learning so the next time danger comes, our people are safer, calmer, and more prepared.



# Crisis Response Through Time: How Communities Have Always Led the Way

When we picture a crisis response team, it is easy to imagine uniforms, badges, and clipboards. But history keeps reminding us that the first and often strongest line of response is ordinary neighbors who refuse to look away when things fall apart.

In 1906, when the San Francisco earthquake shattered buildings and lives in a single morning, professional responders were quickly overwhelmed. What kept many people alive were not only soldiers or officials, but neighbors who formed bucket lines, cooked food over open fires, and created informal camps where families could sleep. They checked on elders, looked for missing children, and shared what little they had. In those moments, the community itself became the crisis team.

Twelve years later, during the influenza pandemic of 1918, the story repeated in a quieter but equally powerful way. Homes became sick rooms, and church basements turned into volunteer care centers. Families left meals on doorsteps so others could eat without risking exposure. Local women and youth groups organized to visit the ill, sit with the dying, and watch over children whose parents were bedridden. There were no cameras to record these visits, yet this invisible care was as important as any medical supply.

Many years later, Hurricane Katrina showed again how vital community involvement is. In New Orleans, when floodwaters rose and official systems failed, people used their fishing boats, canoes, and even doors turned into rafts to pull neighbors from submerged homes. Churches opened their doors as shelters and makeshift clinics. Barber shops became information hubs where people shared news and searched for missing relatives. The compassion of local



residents filled gaps that no outside agency could cover alone.

In more recent fire seasons, such as during the Camp Fire in California, we saw how community members became rescuers, guides, and healers in very personal ways. Neighbors pounded on doors to wake sleeping families, gave rides to people without cars, and helped elders carry pets, medications, and treasured photos to safety. Some people drove back into danger to reach relatives who could not drive. Others stood at crossroads with hand painted signs, pointing the way through heavy smoke when traffic signals and cell service failed.

After the flames passed, the work of the community did not stop. People opened their homes and driveways to friends and strangers in campers and cars. They organized clothing drives and pop-up food stations in parking lots. Volunteers helped families sort through ash and debris, gently lifting out anything that could still be saved. These quiet, steady acts of care carried people through the smoke and grief long after the fire trucks left and the news cameras moved on.

These stories remind us that crisis response is not only about systems and plans. It is about relationships, trust, and shared responsibility that are built over years of living side by side. When community members are trained, informed, and invited into crisis planning, we honor what history has always shown. Ordinary people, working together, often make the difference between despair and hope.

## FREE CERTS...!

### Get Them While You Still Can!

FEMA offers a range of free certifications through the Emergency Management Institute's Independent Study (IS) website. These certifications cover various aspects of emergency management, disaster response, and preparedness, providing valuable training and credentials to individuals involved in emergency services, community planning, and public safety. From courses on incident command systems and disaster response operations to specialized training in areas like hazardous materials management and crisis communications, FEMA's IS certifications offer comprehensive learning opportunities accessible to anyone with internet access. Whether you're a seasoned emergency responder or a concerned citizen looking to enhance your knowledge and skills, these certifications equip you with the tools and expertise needed to effectively respond to emergencies and contribute to resilient communities. Take advantage of FEMA's free certifications through the IS website to strengthen your preparedness and make a difference in emergency management efforts.

Register for your FEMA Student Identification (SID) at the following address:

<https://cdp.dhs.gov/femasid/register>

Take a look at the courses they offer:

<https://training.fema.gov/is/rslist.aspx?lang=en>