

## Community Emergency Response Team Training

---

“I can’t do that because...”

“What if...?”

So many people with disabilities use those and other excuses to shy away from challenges and avoid venturing out of their safety zones – including me.

That’s why in February I began an eight-week Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training course. CERT programs train ordinary citizens to be prepared to respond in the event of disasters and hazards that could impact their communities.



Training focuses on basic disaster response skills, like fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization and disaster medical operations. Upon successful completion of CERT training, team members are qualified to help others in their neighborhoods and workplaces following an emergency and before professional responders arrive. CERT members also are encouraged to support local emergency response agencies by participating in community emergency preparedness projects.

I wasn’t sure how much or how little I could do as a participant in CERT training, but I didn’t let doubts dampen my enthusiasm and curiosity. I was interested in learning what to expect from first responders if ever I found myself in the midst of a disaster and, just maybe, what I might be able to do to help others around me.

CERT training offered new perspectives on my limitations, but far more importantly, it revealed my capabilities when faced with disaster. I learned what assistance may be available to me from others and I discovered I am capable of helping myself as well as lending assistance to those around me. I am able to perform some first aid, like bandaging and splinting, and I can instruct others in providing additional first aid. I can conduct basic search and rescue with modified techniques and I can extinguish a fire with a 5-pound fire extinguisher, something I hadn’t thought possible.

The training exercises included practicing emergency first aid and learning techniques to extract survivors from damaged structures. The key lesson we learned was that personal safety is the number-one priority for any emergency responder.

For me, learning the management structure, or Incident Command System, used by fire and law enforcement agencies to manage emergency operations was one of the most important topics covered in the CERT training. Knowing who does what, when, where, why and how helps make sense of what at first appears to be a complicated and confusing web of agencies and missions.



Whether involved in an emergency situation as a CERT volunteer or as a victim, I now know the chain of command, procedures used to assess a situation, and how to get help after a disaster for myself and my neighbor.

Other topics included in the training were disaster medical operations, disaster psychology, and terrorist incidents – topics everyone should be aware of because of the constant threat from natural disasters and local emergencies that may affect our lives at any given moment.

I encourage everyone, both people with disabilities and those without disabilities, to take CERT training. For more information on classes near you, visit the CERT Web site at [www.citizencorps.org/cert/](http://www.citizencorps.org/cert/).