n the wake of the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the nation came together in a rare show of unified support and human compassion. Capitalizing on our need to support each other and our nation in these trying times, President George W. Bush charged the nation with a mission in his 2002 State of the Union address. He called upon every American to dedicate two years or 4,000 hours over the course of their lives to serving others. This call to action launched USA Freedom Corps, an effort to foster a culture of service, citizenship, and responsibility, building on the generous nature of the American people. As a component of USA Freedom Corps, Citizen Corps was also created as a national grassroots effort to involve citizens in helping their communities prevent, prepare for, and respond to natural and man-made disasters and other emergencies.

Citizens have become increasingly important in making sure our nation and communities are safer, stronger, and better prepared to respond to emergencies of all kinds. As a result, state and local government officials have increased opportunities for citizens to become an integral part of protecting the homeland and supporting emergency responders. Today, many of these opportunities are coordinated through Citizen Corps Councils and the five partner programs: USAonWatch/Neighborhood Watch, Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS), Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), and Fire Corps. Together, these programs provide volunteer opportunities for citizens and community members to support all aspects of emergency response.

Although all of the Citizen Corps programs are designed to complement and support each other, Fire Corps and CERT have a unique relationship. Both programs are designed to assist local fire and emergency services, with CERT primarily providing operational or emergency support during times of disaster, and Fire Corps primarily providing non-operational or non-emergency support on an ongoing basis. CERT and Fire Corps are often implemented at the local level through a community’s fire/EMS department or emergency management office. Together, these two programs provide critical support for emergency responders, allowing them to focus on training and preparing for emergencies as well as supplementing scarce first-responder resources in times of large-scale disasters.

By working together, CERT and Fire Corps provide a well-rounded approach to supporting our nation’s fire and emergency services, while offering citizens more opportunities than ever before to play a role in emergency preparedness. Through these efforts, communities across the nation are becoming safer, stronger, and better prepared, and fire and EMS departments are better equipped to respond to emergencies and disasters. Ultimately, Citizen Corps programs such as CERT and Fire Corps mobilize the nation to work together to mitigate the risks posed by natural disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina, and man-made disasters, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

This guide outlines how CERT and Fire Corps can work together to build stronger communities. It looks at the challenges faced by both programs and shows how working together can help overcome these challenges. This guide also includes profiles of departments that have successfully combined their CERT and Fire Corps efforts to develop a comprehensive program that benefits fire and emergency service departments and the communities they serve.

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What Is Fire Corps?

Since September 11, 2001, fire and emergency service departments across the nation are struggling with increasing demands for service coupled with inadequate funding. In addition to responding to fires and medical emergencies, firefighters and EMS personnel are called upon to respond to natural disasters, terrorist attacks, and other emergencies facing their communities. In an effort to help departments face these increasing demands, Fire Corps was launched in December 2004, making it the newest of the five partner programs under Citizen Corps.

Fire Corps’ mission is to increase the capacity of volunteer, career, and combination fire and EMS departments through the use of community volunteers. These volunteers help resource-constrained departments by performing non-operational or non-emergency roles, making departments better able to develop, implement, expand, and sustain programs and services that meet the needs of their communities. In fulfilling these roles, citizens allow their local firefighters and emergency medical personnel to focus their efforts on training for and responding to critical, life-threatening situations while also increasing the ability of the department to provide additional programs and services for the community it serves.

Through Fire Corps, individuals across the country assist their local departments in a myriad of roles, including conducting fire prevention activities at the state and local levels, fundraising, providing canteen services (drinks and food) for emergency responders during lengthy incidents, maintaining emergency apparatus, performing administrative duties, and much more. The range of tasks citizens can perform is limited only by the needs of the department. In return, citizens gain an intimate understanding of the fire and emergency services and become better prepared to handle their own emergencies as well as those of their neighbors.

Several key industry associations recognized Fire Corps’ potential to foster a greater sense of preparedness and partnered to make Fire Corps a reality. These organizations include the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC), the United States Fire Administration (USFA), and thirteen additional national fire and emergency service organizations. Together, this group makes up the Fire Corps National Advisory Committee, which provides direction and input on the program as well as on emerging issues in the fire and emergency services. These organizations also make up the fire service subcommittee of the National Citizen Corps Council. Fire Corps is administered by the NVFC, which is located in Washington, DC, and receives its funding from the Department of Homeland Security.

More information about Fire Corps may be found at www.firecorps.org or by calling 1-888-FC-INFO1 (324-6361).

What Is CERT?

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program educates people about disaster preparedness for hazards that may impact their community and trains them in basic disaster response skills such as fire safety, light search and rescue operations, team organization, and disaster medical operations. The concept for this community response initiative evolved from repeated large-scale disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes in which the need for emergency assistance far exceeded the capabilities of local first responders. During such situations, it is often the victim or bystander who is, by default, the “first responder” to the scene. In fact, in 95 percent of all emergencies the victim or bystander provides the first immediate assistance on the scene until trained emergency personnel arrives. Launched as a national all-hazards training program by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 1994, CERT provides training and organizational tools for community members to support first responders, provide immediate assistance to victims, and organize spontaneous volunteers during widespread emergencies.

CERTs are most commonly organized under a jurisdiction’s fire/EMS department or the emergency management office. Some CERT programs are also sponsored by local law enforcement agencies. Although many people will respond to those in need regardless of whether they are a CERT member, CERT offers in-depth, hands-on training to equip all citizens with the decision-making, organizational, and practical skills they need to offer immediate assistance while waiting for professional help to arrive. The 20-hour basic CERT training prepares citizens to provide critical emergency support effectively and efficiently without placing themselves or others in danger. Many local CERT programs also offer supplemental training to build on team members’ skills and maintain team capabilities.

CERT is a positive and realistic approach to emergency and disaster situations where citizens will be initially on their own and their actions can make a difference. Through training, members of a community can extinguish small fires, provide basic medical aid, search for and rescue victims safely, and organize others to be an effective and efficient post-emergency response unit. CERTs may also help with non-emergency projects that improve the safety of the community.

More information about CERT is available at www.citizencorps.gov/cert/.
CERT & Fire Corps: Working Together

Although CERT and Fire Corps are separate programs, there is significant overlap in their missions and how these missions are carried out. Both programs provide a great deal of support to the fire and emergency services and therefore tend to appeal to the same audience. CERT and Fire Corps volunteers may even find themselves fulfilling similar roles, such as assisting with traffic control during community events or emergency incidents, installing smoke alarms, conducting training for the department, or serving as a communication back-up for the department through the use of local HAM radio experts. Rather than duplicating efforts, these overlapping roles present an excellent opportunity for CERT and Fire Corps to work together, strengthening the role that these citizens play in the community by providing them with both the operational opportunities found within the CERT program and the non-operational opportunities found within the Fire Corps program.

By combining efforts, CERT and Fire Corps participants stand to gain more members with more skills, which benefits the departments, the communities they serve, and the volunteers themselves. By training community members for both CERT and Fire Corps, departments have an even more powerful resource at their fingertips. Individuals can help the department in an emergency capacity through CERT while still providing important non-operational assistance between emergencies through Fire Corps. The volunteers also benefit because they can become even more engaged with the department, maintain continuous involvement both during emergencies and in between, and have a greater range of volunteer opportunities from which to choose.

Between CERT and Fire Corps, members of the community become equipped to assist their local fire and emergency service departments in nearly any way imaginable, allowing these departments to provide additional programs and services and increasing the ability of the community to respond in times of crisis. Through CERT, citizens become trained in hands-on, life-saving skills such as first aid and light search and rescue techniques that can make the difference between life and death when first responders are overwhelmed. Fire Corps volunteers, also known as citizen advocates, supplement a department’s personnel in non-emergency roles, allowing first responders to focus on training and responding to emergency calls while increasing the department’s ability to provide additional programs and services, such as public education and outreach.

Benefits of Working Together

Volunteer Retention and Recruitment

Like nearly every volunteer-based program today, both CERT and Fire Corps programs face the ongoing challenges of retention and recruitment. However, these challenges are not insurmountable and can be easily overcome with a little creativity and effort. In fact, one characteristic that makes CERT and Fire Corps so compatible is that their retention and recruitment challenges tend to complement each other. CERT primarily faces challenges with volunteer retention, while Fire Corps primarily faces challenges with volunteer recruitment. By working together, CERT and Fire Corps can offer volunteers what they need and want from their experience, making both programs stronger while mitigating the retention and recruitment challenges.

Any successful volunteer program relies equally on both retention and recruitment. Perhaps an organization is expanding its volunteer program or needs volunteers with new or specialized skills. In this case volunteer recruitment is essential to the success of the program. However, it is also important to consider the time and effort that has gone into training existing volunteers and the experience that they take with them if they leave the program. For this reason, volunteer retention is also vital to the programs’ success. A department that utilizes volunteers in both CERT and Fire Corps capacities better meets the volunteers’ needs by providing more opportunities, challenges, and the chance to learn and develop new skill sets. This in turn increases the ability of the department to both retain and recruit the volunteers that it needs.

Let’s face it, CERT offers an exciting opportunity with great immediate benefits. Volunteers not only learn valuable skills such as emergency readiness, first aid, using fire extinguishers, and light search and rescue techniques, they become CERT-certified knowing that they’ll be prepared to provide a valuable and potentially life-saving service in the face of the next local disaster or emergency. In the wake of disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and 9/11,
individuals often feel a strong need to give back to their community. CERT is a great way to fulfill this need and can help foster a sense of unity and belonging among those affected. However, local disasters and emergencies don’t happen every day. In fact, once trained, CERT volunteers may go weeks, months, or even years before they are able to put their skills to use. This downtime between emergency incidents may cause once eager volunteers to lose interest, their skills may become stale, or they may seek other opportunities that provide more regular chances to volunteer.

By utilizing CERT members for Fire Corps activities, these volunteers are able to remain engaged with the department on a more regular basis, tap into a variety of skills as they work to increase the capacity of their local fire/EMS department, and have a multitude of challenging and rewarding opportunities from which to choose. Together, these characteristics help to maintain volunteers’ interest, enthusiasm, and motivation, making volunteer retention much easier and probable for the organization.

By itself, Fire Corps offers a number of exciting and challenging opportunities for potential volunteers on a regular basis, but initial recruitment can be significantly more difficult because the program doesn’t tap into the same sense of urgency and immediacy that is found during and immediately following emergencies. CERT can serve as an excellent recruiting mechanism for departments seeking community volunteers because it provides a very immediate and rewarding benefit to those who participate. As such, CERT is an excellent gateway to introduce members of the community to a department. Incorporating these same volunteers into a Fire Corps program ensures that the volunteers will remain stimulated, feel useful, and be provided multiple opportunities to expand their skills.

Maximizing Resources
Utilizing volunteers in both CERT and Fire Corps programs can maximize the resources that a department puts into a volunteer program as well as the resources that they get out of the program. For example, although both CERT and Fire Corps programs can be extremely beneficial to fire and emergency service departments, the task of recruiting volunteers for just one program can seem difficult while recruiting for two programs can seem impossible. Cross-training volunteers for CERT and Fire Corps can cut this recruitment process in half and provide a wealth of opportunities for potential volunteers to choose from, allowing the program to appeal to a wider, more diverse audience.

Because both programs support the fire and emergency services, they tend to appeal to largely the same audience. However, rather than competing for the same citizen volunteers for two separate programs, both programs stand to benefit greatly by working together to cross-train their volunteers for both CERT and Fire Corps. Departments can utilize their resources much more effectively by simply reaching out to the same audience with a single, more robust volunteer program that incorporates both CERT and Fire Corps principles.

Training
One of Fire Corps’ and CERT’s greatest strengths is that the programs can be tailored to fit the needs of any department, whether it is large or small, metropolitan or rural. However, the disparity among local Fire Corps programs can make it difficult to use the same volunteer training across the board. Because of this, many departments that currently have both CERT and Fire Corps programs are using CERT as the entry-point for all volunteers, ensuring that all interested persons obtain the valuable and potentially life-saving skills offered through the 20-hour CERT training course. This is a great way to give volunteers a structured introduction to your department while equipping them with valuable skills. This life-saving training also gives members of your community the confidence of knowing that they have the skills to help in the face of an emergency and may pique their interest in helping out in other ways.
Implementing CERT/Fire Corps Programs

Implementing a volunteer program in your department that allows members of your community to volunteer in both CERT and Fire Corps activities does not need to be a complicated task. If your department already has a volunteer program, whether it’s for operational or non-operational volunteers, you probably already have many of the policies and procedures in place that you will need to expand the volunteer opportunities. If your department doesn’t have a volunteer program in place, Fire Corps and CERT have already compiled most of the guidance you will need, making your job much easier. The following steps guide you through establishing and implementing CERT and Fire Corps programs in your community:

1. **ASSESS**
   The first step in determining if your department will benefit from using volunteers cross-trained in both CERT and Fire Corps is to assess the needs of your department. Is your department in a high-risk area for natural or man-made disasters such as hurricanes or terrorist attacks where citizen assistance may be critical in the event of an emergency? Does your department need assistance with fundraising, public education, administrative work, or other non-emergency tasks? If the answer to either of these questions is yes, then your department will benefit by implementing both CERT and Fire Corps programs. Remember, retention and recruitment for any volunteer program can be challenging. By offering individuals a wider variety of volunteer activities, training them in life-saving skills, and providing them with challenging and consistent opportunities, you will have far more success in retaining and recruiting volunteers. Offering both programs together enables you to multiply the abilities of your volunteer force while minimizing the organizational resources that must go into retention, recruitment, and training efforts.

2. **ASK**
   If your department already has a CERT program in place, simply ask your CERT volunteers if they would like to help out in other, non-emergency areas within the department, such as those afforded by Fire Corps. Chances are they will say yes. By completing the CERT training, they have already devoted a significant amount of time and energy to your department and the community and may welcome the opportunity to keep their skills, knowledge, and newfound connection to the department fresh and engaged. Many volunteers are looking for opportunities that are challenging, allow them to succeed and develop new skills, and let them feel like they are contributing to their community. Together, CERT and Fire Corps offer a multitude of opportunities that will appeal to a broad audience with diverse interests and aptitudes.

   If your department already has a Fire Corps program in place, ask your volunteers if they are interested in learning life-saving skills such as first aid or search and rescue. As we learned in the wake of catastrophic events such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, citizens are realizing that emergency preparedness is more important than ever before and are seeking ways to ensure their own safety in times of crisis as well as ways to help their families, neighbors, and fellow citizens when disaster strikes. Getting the training offered by CERT is a great way to become better prepared for all types of emergencies and can be a very rewarding experience for those involved.

3. **REGISTER**
   Whether you decide to implement CERT, Fire Corps, or both, register your program on the appropriate web site for access to the latest news, resources, and updates. You can register your CERT program at [www.citizencorps.gov/cert/index.shtm](http://www.citizencorps.gov/cert/index.shtm) and your Fire Corps program at [www.firecorps.org](http://www.firecorps.org). Registration takes just a few minutes and provides you with great benefits, including access to the nationwide network of departments and organizations that have already imple-
mented CERT and Fire Corps programs, as well as access to important materials, downloads, and monthly e-newsletters. Registration also enters you into a searchable database that allows volunteers to find your program.

4. IMPLEMENT
Consider how you will implement your CERT and Fire Corps programs. Will individuals have a choice to participate in either CERT or Fire Corps, or will they participate in both programs? Does your department need volunteer applications, policies, or ways to tell your community about these exciting new opportunities?

Many of the documents and materials that you need to implement and maintain CERT and Fire Corps programs can be found on the respective program web sites at www.citizencorps.gov/cert/index.shtm or www.firecorps.org. Here you will find training materials, sample volunteer applications, policies, press releases, and much more.

Of course, simply starting a CERT and/or Fire Corps program will not bring people knocking on your door. You must advertise these volunteer opportunities in your community and invite people to help your department. Both CERT and Fire Corps provide a myriad of tools you can use to do just this, including brochures, videos, and PSAs. Visit the CERT web site at www.citizencorps.gov/cert/index.shtm and Fire Corps at www.firecorps.org to view and download these materials for use in your community. You may also contact CERT at cert@dhs.gov and Fire Corps at 1-888-FC-INFO1 (324-6361) or info@firecorps.org. You may also consider using 1-800-FIRE-LINE, a national toll-free number anyone can call to find out more about volunteer opportunities with the fire and emergency services in their area. More information on 1-800-FIRE-LINE can be found on the Fire Corps web site at www.firecorps.org.

Remember, even though volunteers are unpaid, they are still seeking something from the experience. In addition to advertising the many opportunities available to interested citizens, make sure they know what they will get out of this experience, whether it’s valuable training, new challenges, skill development, or simply camaraderie and the ability to give back to their community.

5. TRAIN
Consider using CERT as the training foundation for both your CERT and Fire Corps programs. CERT provides a structured training mechanism that can serve as an excellent introduction to your department, while also providing participants with valuable and potentially life-saving skills that will benefit not only the volunteer, but also their friends, family members, colleagues, and neighbors. You may wish to incorporate training into the CERT curriculum that will assist volunteers in performing non-emergency activities, such as conducting fire prevention and life safety education in the community and in local schools, installing smoke alarms, or assisting with traffic control during community events and emergency incidents.
Profiles

Alpharetta Fire and Emergency Services
Alpharetta, Georgia

The Alpharetta Fire and Emergency Services (AFES) Department is located approximately 25 miles northeast of Atlanta, GA. The AFES uses the CERT program as the entry point for all volunteer activities within the department. Once citizens complete the 20-hour CERT training, they have the option of moving into the Fire Corps program as well, allowing them to serve on a more consistent basis and in areas other than disaster response.

Today, individuals that comprise the department’s Fire Corps team maintain and operate the department’s rehabilitation services (REHAB) and are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As part of the REHAB team, they provide an area for rest, relief from the elements, and medical evaluation to the departments’ firefighters and other emergency personnel during lengthy emergency incidents.

In addition to the REHAB team, the departments’ Fire Corps members assist the department in areas such as traffic control, crowd control, recruitment, and volunteer direction and oversight. Thanks to their CERT training, they are also able to provide medical assistance in certain situations. Other Fire Corps members teach department-sponsored classes, including CPR and first aid. The department makes a concerted effort to tap into each individual’s personal and professional skills as well as their interests in an effort to develop a mutually satisfying and effective relationship. In doing so, the department has also found Fire Corps volunteers who assist with the departments’ lengthy accreditation process, which requires an in-depth internal analysis of the department, its programs, and its management practices.

Ormond Beach Fire Department
City of Ormond Beach, FL

The Ormond Beach Fire Department is located in Volusia County just south of Daytona Beach, FL. After starting a CERT program in 2003, the Ormond Beach Fire Department quickly realized that there were not enough disasters or other emergencies in their area to keep their CERT volunteers active. In an effort to give these dedicated volunteers more opportunities to choose from while keeping them engaged in department activities, the department implemented a Fire Corps program. Through Fire Corps, each CERT member now has the option to participate on a more frequent basis in a variety of non-emergency roles.

Eager to do more for their community, many of the department’s CERT members joined the Fire Corps team where they help out in a variety of ways. The department has found many benefits to utilizing their CERT-trained volunteers in Fire Corps. Because they are trained in first aid, these CERT/Fire Corps volunteers are able to assist during large-scale community events such as the Daytona area’s annual bike week festivities, where they are able to provide immediate medical assistance until the department’s professional first responders arrive on scene. Fire Corps members also help the department in other ways such as assisting at the community’s 4th of July festivities, fundraising, conducting fire prevention and life safety education activities within the community, and providing rehab services (food and drinks) to the department’s first responders during lengthy emergency incidents.

Prior to implementing a Fire Corps program, the Ormond Beach Fire Department found that they were having trouble expanding their CERT program. While they had a small group of dedicated volunteers, it wasn’t until they added Fire Corps that they were able to expand the number of volunteers helping their department. The expansion was the result of increased volunteer opportunities and the fact that the volunteers were being called upon to do more things.
Profiles

Whitman Fire Rescue
Whitman, MA

Whitman Fire Rescue is a combination department located in the small town of Whitman, MA, just 22 miles southeast of Boston. Prompted by the desire of their CERT members to do more, the department launched a Fire Corps program in 2005, expanding the opportunities for CERT volunteers to become involved. All CERT and Fire Corps volunteers are cross-trained in both programs. Today, some 45 CERT/Fire Corps members assist the department by conducting fire ground activities such as rehab services, crowd control, and lighting, as well as by managing shelter operations during community evacuations and providing communications backup through amateur radio operations.

The department’s firefighters and emergency medical personnel conduct the necessary training for their CERT/Fire Corps volunteers. These volunteers receive the same standard non-emergency training that is required of the department’s first responders. In addition to the required CERT training, these volunteers are certified in CPR and AED and are trained in triage and in filling air tanks. Cross-training their volunteers in both Fire Corps and CERT has benefited the department in many ways. In addition to helping the department retain their volunteers by keeping them involved and active, these dual-trained community members are able to assist the department with everything from pumping cellars during flood season to assisting with triage during large-scale incidents.

“It was effortless and everyone benefited,” said a department representative about incorporating CERT volunteers into Fire Corps. “Volunteer members responded very quickly and it has benefited the town.” The department was able to use its existing policies to cover both the CERT and Fire Corps programs, and the department’s existing training officer became the training officer for the CERT and Fire Corps programs. Together, this team of volunteers is able to help the department both during and between disasters.

Rowlett Citizen Corps Council
Rowlett, TX

Located outside of Dallas, TX, the Rowlett Citizen Corps Council has implemented CERT-Relief, a truly hybrid program that incorporates both CERT and Fire Corps principles and training. Today, all but two of the 40 registered CERT-Relief members are cross-trained in the CERT curriculum. This cross-training between Fire Corps and CERT has proven to be beneficial to CERT-Relief volunteers, allowing them to provide emergency assistance to potential flood victims when Rowlett received 11 inches of rain, as well as care and shelter for 50 employees and patrons when a suspicious substance caused the evacuation of a U.S. Post Office in Rowlett during one of the hottest days in Texas.

In addition to providing supplemental emergency support in times of community need, CERT-Relief members are also able to provide critical non-emergency assistance to the area’s first responders through REHAB ONE, a specialized canteen response vehicle. Purchased in September 2005, REHAB ONE has become an essential part of CERT-Relief’s incident response, enabling members to provide food and beverages for firefighters and emergency responders during lengthy emergency incidents. CERT-Relief members also host public safety expos to promote volunteerism in their community and are currently working to supply privately-funded emergency weather public alert radios to daycare centers and private schools located within their community. Whitney Laning, President of Rowlett Citizen Corps Council, says of the volunteers, “They all have passion for helping others and for making their community better. The program inspires citizens to act and take responsibility for their neighborhood.”

The Rowlett Citizen Corps Council attributes the success of their program to four factors: partnership and collaboration, advocacy and public relations, retention and recruitment, and flexible leadership. By cross-training volunteers through this unique CERT/Fire Corps partnership, the Rowlett Citizen Corps Council has successfully maximized their volunteer resources and is able to provide both emergency and non-emergency support to local fire/EMS departments, making their community safer, stronger, and better prepared.