

Most people may think of a breath mint when they hear the word CERT but the acronym stands for Community Emergency Response Team which is a group of trained volunteers that assist in both emergency and nonemergency situations. The concept of the Community Emergency Response Team was developed in 1985 by the Los Angeles City Fire Department after a major disaster. Citizens had to rely on themselves and each other for a period of time until professional responders arrived. This prompted the training of citizens with lifesaving skills who can immediately respond and tend to the needs within their community. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) then adopted the program which became an extension of the first responder services. CERT materials were developed making them applicable to all types of hazards across the nation.

The Tuscola County Community Emergency Response Team got its start in 2009 at a meeting with then Tuscola County Emergency Manager Patrick Finn, then Caro Fire Chief Dave Mattlin, Caro Police Chief Brian Newcomb, and Mayville resident and Lapeer County CERT member Elaine Fiorillo. Appropriate trainings, scheduling, and organization registration was undertaken to run a CERT in Tuscola County, and the first students began thirteen weeks of classroom training on August 11, 2010 at the Caro Fire Department. Prior to beginning this classroom training, students were required to complete and pass an on-line FEMA course in which they received and printed a certificate brought the first day of class. Classroom training included hands-on skills taught by instructors qualified in their area of expertise. This basic 13-week CERT instruction includes:

- Course Instruction and Disaster Preparedness

- Fire Safety
- Disaster Medical Operations, Part I and II
- Light Search & Rescue I and II
- Hazardous Materials Awareness
- Disaster Psychology
- Terrorism & CERT
- CERT Liability Issues
- CPR/AED/First Aid Certification

Since the start of the first CERT training in Tuscola County subsequent basic trainings have been conducted at the Mayville Fire Department. CERT basic training is available to any and all citizens without discrimination as to age, race, religion, sex, handicap, sexual orientation or national origin. The more people who know basic safety and lifesaving skills, the safer our communities will be. Not all citizens that take the CERT basic training will become CERT members. To become a member candidates must, in addition to taking and passing the online FEMA courses, attend and participate in CERT basic training, pass a background check, be approved by Tuscola CERT officers, and may or may not have to undergo an interview. Upon acceptance into Tuscola County CERT new members are given a backpack containing basic supplies, an identification badge that must be worn when responding to a CERT approved event, and allowed to order clothing with the approved CERT logo. Members are also required to read and understand the Tuscola County CERT by-laws, keep CPR and First Aid Certifications current, attend the majority of meetings and trainings, complete required FEMA 'Independent Study' online courses, follow the rules and regulations governing the conduct of

CERT members and commit to the CERT goal, "To do the greatest good for the greatest amount of people."

Training for most organizations does not stop after the basics are learned. The Tuscola County CERT meets and holds most of its trainings through the Mayville Fire Department which has graciously allowed us to use their fire hall and instructor expertise to house and conduct ongoing training for this county organization. Additional training has included:

- Knot Tying
- Water Rescue
- Radio Use
- Compass Instruction
- Ice Rescue
- Traffic Control
- Disaster Simulations
- Fire Equipment Usage/Location
- Search and Rescue Trainings

CERT members also have many training opportunities and have attended:

- Skywarn
- Mental Health First Aid
- Sandbagging
- Region 3 Citizen Corps Seminars and Workshops
- CISM
- Animal Emergencies I&II
- Amateur Radio Operator

While much of focus for CERT training is to respond in emergency situations, CERT is also

available for non-emergency events like Caro's Cars & Crafts, Tuscola County Pumpkin Festival and Grand Parade, Mayville's Firework Display, Vassar Parades including Travis Mills Homecoming, and numerous other activities involving promotional and educational booths and activities for the community and public awareness in emergency preparedness.

Tuscola County CERT members have documented over 500 hours volunteer hours in the prior listed community events. This does not include trainings, meetings or any of the numerous other tasks involved in the running and promoting of a volunteer organization. Basic CERT trainings and additional skill building classes have been done by instructors volunteering their time with a handful of exceptions. Some instructors who have been reimbursed by the government for their instructional time have donated the funds back to Tuscola CERT, facilitating better equipping of the team to respond to many situations. Local grants have also been obtained including funds from the Tuscola County Community Foundation which helped with the cost of purchasing necessary emergency items, and materials needed in the running of an organization.

Although considered a government entity, CERT is a part of Citizen Corps which falls under the umbrella of FEMA and more locally our Tuscola Office of Emergency Management. CERT members are activated for emergency situations when a request is made by emergency personnel when responding to a situation that may tax the available resources of the professional responding units whether it be manmade, or a natural event. Contacted members then use the member call-out tree to activate additional CERT members. Non-emergency requests for CERT participation is handled by contacting the Tuscola County Emergency Manager, Deputy Steve Anderson at 989 673-5181, or the Tuscola County CERT Secretary, Brenda Caruthers

at 989 823-7329.