

Illinois Citizen Corps/ Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Frequently Asked Questions

What is the status of the Citizen Corps program?

For over 17 years, the Citizen Corps program sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was the umbrella organization over a number of programs to include CERT, Volunteers in Police Service, Fire Corps, Neighborhood Watch, and Medical Reserve Corps. In late 2019, there was a change nationally.

Since 2002, Citizen Corps Councils have contributed to the resilience of the communities that they serve. More than 1200 registered councils across the nation have produced Individual and Community Preparedness Award winners, FEMA Citizen Corps Achievement Award winners, and received numerous state and local service awards. These councils provide a framework for cooperation amongst local community organizations and national affiliate organizations to advance community preparedness and emergency response.

While state, local, tribal and territorial Citizen Corps programs can and should continue their outstanding efforts to create resilient communities, FEMA is no longer managing the Citizen Corps program at the national level. Whole community coalitions come in many forms and bear many names. The value of Citizen Corps always was, and will remain, in the hard work and efforts of council members and representatives at the state and community level.

This decision has no effect on partner programs such as FEMA's Community Emergency Response Team Program, or non-FEMA organizations such as Volunteers in Police Service, Fire Corps, or any of the many Citizen Corps Affiliate programs. Citizen Corps Councils, affiliates, partners, and members may continue to utilize FEMA's preparedness programming and resources, including ordering resources from the FEMA publications warehouse, participating in local as well as national readiness exercises, and downloading all of FEMA's preparedness products and guides available at www.ready.gov.

If you have further questions related to this message, you may contact FEMA's Individual and Community Preparedness Division at FEMA-prepare@fema.dhs.gov

What are Illinois' specific rules regarding the Citizen Corps program?

Due to the change at the federal level, there is no longer a state requirement to have a Citizen Corps Council in order to provide oversight to the CERT program. Certainly local programs in Illinois can continue to have a Citizen Corps program. All councils, members and affiliates may continue to utilize FEMA products and resources, including the publications warehouse. Existing councils, programs, and officers at state, local, tribal, and territorial levels may continue to use the Citizen Corps logo and may use the Citizen Corps name for their programs as well as titles and positions. Logos shall be used for appropriate purposes only.

What other resources are available besides the Citizen Corps program?

FEMA continues to serve the public with excellent preparedness programming and materials including the Community Emergency Response Team Program, Youth Preparedness Council, Financial Preparedness materials including the Emergency Financial First Aid Kit, and other resources available by visiting www.ready.gov/publications.

In Illinois, we have many resources on our preparedness page www.ready.illinois.gov

What exactly is the CERT program?

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program educates volunteers about disaster preparedness for the hazards that may impact their area and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. CERT offers a consistent, nationwide approach to volunteer training and organization that professional responders can rely on during disaster situations, allowing them to focus on more complex tasks.

The training is an approximately 18 hour training course available locally for either jurisdictions to create a team of volunteers that can assist the jurisdiction or to provide citizens in order to take care of themselves and neighbors.

Who should I contact if I have questions about CERT?

In Illinois, the Serve Illinois Commission is the lead agency in administering the CERT program. At the present time, the point of contact is Michelle Hanneken, Volunteer Programs Manager. She can be reached at michelle.j.hanneken@illinois.gov or 217-524-2251.

Who can sponsor a CERT program?

In Illinois, historically a local unit of government is a sponsor of a CERT program. Jurisdictions at the city, village, township, county, and regional level generally choose a specific department that the management and implementation of CERT resides. In many cases, it is within emergency management but there are many who choose to use the police department, fire department, mayor's office, health department, etc. There is no wrong way of doing business in this regard-only what works best for that jurisdiction. It is important to note that CERT training can also exist within non-profit and other organizations.

How do I register a CERT program?

All CERT programs should register on the FEMA website at www.ready.gov/cert. When a new registration has been submitted, FEMA routes it to the state CERT point of contact for review and approval. In Illinois, the Serve Illinois Commission is the lead agency in administering the CERT program. A member of the Serve Illinois Commission will reach out to the person that has registered the program to gain an understanding about the registration. After this, the registration will be approved or denied.

What reporting requirements are required of a CERT program?

Each year at the beginning of the calendar year, FEMA plans to ask all CERT programs to log into their program's page at www.ready.gov/cert to answer questions about the CERT program's activities of the last year. As more information is available regarding reporting, local CERT programs will be notified.

Also, as program points of contact change, it is imperative that the program keeps up both their information on the above mentioned website as well as notifies the Serve Illinois Commission to ensure they are aware of the change. There is correspondence regarding upcoming events, training, and exercises that the program will miss out on if both of these steps are not completed.

I administer a CERT program. Where can I get someone to attend the train-the-trainer so we can have more trainers in our jurisdiction?

Each year, the Serve Illinois Commission works with both the Illinois Emergency Management Agency as well as a group of CERT trainers to schedule the CERT train-the-trainer course in Illinois. The goal is that the training is provided up to 3 times a year in different areas of the state, based on where the majority of the CERT programs are located. Requirements in order to attend the course are outlined on the course website. The website will also have the current training schedule. Please see <http://public.iema.state.il.us/iema/training/Course.asp?CourseID=3140> for further details.

If I am looking for best practices or other CERT programs in Illinois, where should I go?

In 2019, an association of local CERT programs was formed in Illinois. The CERT Association of Illinois meets regularly and is comprised of almost all of the 45-50 CERT programs in Illinois. This association is a great partner with the state and helps set forth policy, training, and exercises as it relates to CERT in Illinois. The Association also has a website under development. Please contact the Serve Illinois Commission for further details should you wish to join this group.

I want to attend a local CERT class. How do I find out about upcoming training?

You can visit the FEMA website at https://community.fema.gov/Register/Register_Search_Programs to search for your zip code to find what CERT programs exist near you. Direct contact information will be provided on the website and you can reach out directly to them to find out the training schedule for your area.

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