



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

DATE ISSUED: September 15, 2006 REPORT NO. 06-127

ATTENTION: Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee
Agenda of September 20, 2006

SUBJECT: CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) San Diego
Program Update – San Diego Fire-Rescue Department

SUMMARY

THIS IS AN INFORMATIONAL ITEM ONLY. NO ACTION IS REQUIRED ON THE PART OF THE COMMITTEE OR THE CITY COUNCIL.

BACKGROUND

In October 2003, San Diego experienced the largest wildfire in California history. The Cedar Fires burned 280,278 acres in San Diego County, and crippled public safety resources.

As a direct result of this disaster, and in an effort to enhance citizen preparedness and responsibility, the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department created the San Diego Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program in January 2004. The program is managed as a public/private partnership to leverage City resources through grants, donations, class fees and volunteer services.

CERT San Diego prepares and mobilizes citizens, businesses and community groups to be a part of the solution during disasters. Members are provided with intensive 24-hour training in first aid, search and rescue techniques, fire extinguisher use, national Incident Command System (ICS) skills, disaster psychology, hazardous materials, terrorism awareness, as well as home safety and disaster kit preparation. To better serve their communities, CERT volunteers train with firefighters, lifeguards and paramedics to achieve their national Disaster Service Worker (DSW) credentials.

San Diego Fire-Rescue Department's CERT program serves the 8th largest city in the United States. With its international border, vital tourism base and vast military installations, our region is at risk both for natural and man made disasters. In the first two years of this program, CERT San Diego has trained and mobilized the county's largest CERT citizen volunteer base in support of our local communities. Through hundreds of annual CERT community outreach and marketing presentations, the City promotes disaster preparedness to its citizenry. However, this is only a beginning for a city of 1.3 million residents.

DISCUSSION

As we move forward with program implementation, the challenges and opportunities we face are how to best leverage the program's start up success and the City's resources. After the two-year, \$250,000 seed-money grant for CERT San Diego was awarded, City Council granted the first partial line item funding for CERT in FY 07, to insure the program's vitality.

To enhance City resources, CERT San Diego raised additional money to support the program through public safety grants, business grants, donations and cost recovery programs. We developed the first fee-based Business CERT (BERT) training program; recruited and trained our first two paid BERT academies with QUALCOMM Inc., netting a cost recovery of approximately \$34,000, with more to be realized. We are also seeking to leverage our first successful BERT partnership as a further outreach into the business community. To meet the vital needs of small business owners and managers city-wide, we recruited a sponsored BERT academy for the BID (Business Improvement District) Council, which is scheduled to be held this month. This academy serves the public need, and is sponsored by SDG&E. Communities where BERT businesses are currently located have a community hub for public safety, and their employees are better trained and prepared with the appropriate safety training to protect their home neighborhoods.

In its first two years, San Diego Fire-Rescue trained 542 CERT-certified DSW volunteers, and created 18 community based teams. CERT San Diego dramatically graduates more students than any other regional jurisdiction in service to our citizens. Unfortunately, the number of willing volunteers to support this program outweighs our limited resources. We have identified some at-risk areas where CERT coverage is weak, including the significant attrition of volunteer programs. Local CERT teams require continued support; and like many new programs, CERT San Diego faces start-up funding challenges. It's important to note that we have only begun to reach dense urban areas and key business markets.

Enthusiastic CERT volunteers, dressed in green helmets and vests, carrying CERT DSW ID cards, continue to spread the message deeper into our community and help to augment the City's community outreach. The San Diego Fire-Rescue Department cultivates, mentors and manages more than 20,000 CERT volunteer hours per year.

The program is based on teamwork. Through the City of San Diego's CERT program, citizens partner with emergency responders for disaster preparedness and response. This partnership includes government agencies, regional jurisdictions, community groups, service organizations and businesses throughout the United States. Together, we spread the vital preparedness message and build an invaluable CERT volunteer support base.

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