

Ashland CERT 2007-2008

Community Emergency Response Team- Neighbors Helping Neighbors

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CERT Sandbag crew-January 2008

It is time at CERT to reflect on our path, on what has brought us here, and on where we are heading. **2008 opened with fourteen CERT activations in January alone!** We made a thousand sandbags and we slept more than a few nights on the floor of Ashland's No-Frills Emergency Shelter. Already our community organization feels different than last year at this time. We are being called and we have been responding. We have a few more aches and found a few new muscles...



January 4, 2008 at B-street yard

Since February, 2006, our 3-fold strategic direction for CERT and emergency preparedness has been: Educating and Motivating the Public, Training and Developing Members, and Advancing the Organization. As I began looking back at the 2007 calendar year, it became obvious that we just finished a HUGE year, with training focuses on wildfire evacuation and emergency shelter. I will touch on the 2007 highlights, especially those events that have set us on the trails and evacuation routes on which we now find ourselves.

Ashland No-Frills Emergency Shelter began in 2007, as community member Ruth Coulthard asked to use a city building when the Congregational Church was unavailable. The City recognized the need and the service offered by the local congregation, and developed a complementary policy that included a volunteer and facility coordination role for CERT. We were called three times in 2007 (and then began 2008 with 12 more calls) to assist with community emergency shelter, and soon developed training for CERT and community volunteers.



January 2008 brought a dozen Emergency Shelter nights in Ashland

At our last visioning retreat (January, 2007) we introduced an advanced training element and Chief Roxanne Bercik came up from Los Angeles Fire Dept. to train us in Ashland's emergency plan for wildfire.



CERT Incident Management Team for Wildfire Evacuation at Terra Base

Our local wildfire risk and Ashland's emergency plan with its prominent CERT role became a training and outreach focus for 2007, and CERT volunteers decided to bring it to the whole town. This training and outreach focus culminated in September as our whole city practiced the plan. Our Fire Department accepted the invitation to be lead agency. They wrote an elaborate scenario that even included smoke bombs (but we were specifically instructed to refer to them as fog-emitting devices-FEDS?). Chief Woodley recruited new PD Chief Holderness to be incident commander and on September 17 the

Emergency Operations Center was set up at council chambers. The drill involved most city departments, deploying fire, police, public works and CERT resources into the field.

As usual, communication was the MAIN issue in the city debriefing (what Division Chief Greg Case calls the “cuss and discuss.”) It was so interesting to watch them want to be perfect and experience the same frustrations that we experience in our struggle to be perfect.



City “cuss and discuss” debriefing, 9-17-08

For the exercise, CERT got to save the day. We did door-to-door evacuation notices (150 households in 45 minutes) and we opened an Emergency Reception Center for evacuees at the Grove. It was a new kind of outreach for us. The city departments seem to know us now, and perhaps have a better idea of what we do. A few of our wildland neighbors also got know us in the process, and have been busy preparing their households and neighborhoods for survival. Some of them are now organizing neighbor groups—in order to have the conversation BEFORE the disaster.



Wildfire Evacuation Drill at Lincoln Base

Leading up to that September city wide activation, we had three advanced trainings in situational awareness, structural triage and evacuation protocol using ICS organization. We walked the upper neighborhoods, getting to know

Ashland's cul de sacs, dead end streets and evacuation routes. We practiced with FRS radios, and later with fire radios. Slowly we began to expect the initial chaos that is part of organizing ourselves and part of working within the unfamiliar. Slowly we improved, learned how to read maps, use radios and understand the expectations and learn the terms used by our fire department.

In May, 2007, the Fire Department was asked to make big cuts, and suddenly Ashland CERT's future was in question. As it turned out, we survived but our training budget took a big hit. Instead of 5 Basic Trainings, we were able to hold three in calendar year 2007, two in the fiscal year. Our trainings have been filled with enthusiastic and creative residents.



CERT Graduation at the Fire Station

Also in 2007, CERT Team RV-1 (Rogue Valley One) was born. Our newest team, RV-1 consists of those CERT members who trained in Ashland but live in outlying communities. They meet at Fire District 5 station in Talent and continue to train with us. RV-1 is in the process of looking for an agency home in the Phoenix-Talent area, or in the county. In the past few years, Ashland CERT has trained and supported Jacksonville CERT, RV-1, a CERT group in Coos County and a group forming in Northern California.



RV-1 Organizing Meeting at Jackson County Fire District 5

We realize each year that CERT is vulnerable as city and county budgets are strained. We were able to secure another \$44,000 in Federal grants to continue our work, bringing our six year Ashland CERT grant totals to over \$146,000. Our 2008 focus has been on Advanced Leadership, giving volunteers experience, knowledge and practice in incident management and team leadership. These

skills will serve well as our communities need CERT volunteers during disaster. We have heard from CERT programs in Indiana, Ohio, and Oregon who are asking for our advanced training materials. Advanced training does two things: it prepares volunteers to effectively take on organizational responsibilities in crisis, and it makes the program especially relevant to our volunteers. It deepens our skills. If volunteers feel they are learning something that could be useful and valued, they will stay with an organization, and want to learn more. Advanced training builds retention and expands readiness.



Northwest Citizen Corps Conference

In May, 2007, eight of us from Ashland and Talent went to the regional Citizen Corps Conference in Portland, thanks to funds provided by Oregon Emergency Management to our program. We attended training in managing spontaneous volunteers in disaster (the so-called second disaster) and we hope to bring that training to Jackson County in October, 2008. We also attended a workshop called Map Your Neighborhood, a powerful neighborhood organizing tool and 9-Step guide of what to do in disaster from Washington State Emergency Management.



Map Your Neighborhood Workshop in Jackson County

Ashland CERT and Jackson County Emergency Management worked together to bring the author of the Map Your Neighborhood program, LuAn Johnson, to Jackson County in October, 2007. Several neighborhood groups have since formed in Ashland and Central Point. This two-pronged strategic direction of Advanced Leadership and community organizing through Map Your

Neighborhood are building resiliency and fostering strong communities that can endure uncertain times.



Ashland Map Your Neighborhood Meeting

Moving Ahead:

After a month of non-stop emergency activations in January, Ashland CERT brought back to Southern Oregon Chief Roxanne Bercik from Los Angeles Fire Department. CERT went on retreat, a weekend community and leadership-building disaster exercise at Camp Latgawa on the Rogue National Forest. CERT volunteers took over all leadership roles and our skills increased exponentially.

We practiced ICS (Incident Command System), radio communications, had a landslide scenario exercise and a GPS tracking drill with County Search and Rescue. We found ourselves in the midst of a group we would be honored to serve with in emergency, and prepare with until we are needed.



Advanced Training at Camp Latgawa

On April 25, Ashland CERT's 34th Basic Training session begins, and our new advanced members have taken over a large part of this training and support, showing new members the culture of competence and service that CERT embodies.