



The CERT Report

June 2010

Late Night Fire Rages in Chinatown



Manhattan 3 CERT team members interpreted for tenants and community members and relayed information to first responders during the response to a fire in Chinatown.

Late on the night of Sunday April 11, a seven-alarm fire raged at 285 Grand Street, a six-story building in Chinatown. Flames were shooting 20 to 30 feet in the air and more than 60 Fire Department vehicles deployed to the scene. It was not long before two adjoining buildings caught fire as well.

CERT volunteers don't have the luxury of picking and choosing the time and place an emergency will occur. Frequently, we will go for long periods without even being called up for "stand-by." When this call came, Manhattan 3 CERT, led by Team Chief David Yeung, responded.

Our CERT team was immediately directed to the OEM citywide interagency coordinator who asked us to assist the American Red Cross of Greater New York volunteers to guide families and individuals to Middle School 131. Our goal was to create as much order out of the chaos as possible and to maintain the integrity of the families that were in danger of being separated.

At the school, CERT members assisted with translating and interpreting for the Red Cross. Registration was necessary to determine how many rooms were to be allocated to evacuees and to inform NYC Transit how many buses would be required to transport everyone to the hotel.

By 5:30 AM the citywide interagency coordinators determined that we had accounted for all of the people in the affected buildings, including some who had self-evacuated to the homes of other family members or friends elsewhere in the city. However, our job was not finished.

Throughout the daylight hours the CERT team maintained a presence: reporting periodically with City agencies on the progress of the response, notifying area businesses of when they could reopen, and facilitating any tasks assigned by OEM staff. We finally stood down at 7:30 PM, Monday evening.

To my esteemed CERT colleagues: YOU were the ones who put those hours of training and practice into action when it really mattered. YOU are the individuals, and we as a team, are the ones who were the local experts because we live in this community. While each agency may have some of those services to offer, these are our neighbors, friends, and family. This is why we are CERT.

By Bill Strachan, Manhattan 3 Deputy Team Chief

Fires, Bikes, and Walks: CERTs in Action



A Brooklyn 10/11 CERT member directs traffic at Commodore Barry Park during the Five Boro Bike Tour.

From assisting with citywide events like the MS Walk and the Five Boro Bike Tour, to responding to a seven-alarm fire in Chinatown, CERT volunteers have been busy this spring. Fortunately, five new training classes are under way to train new volunteers.

In addition to the CERT volunteers on scene during the Bike Tour, Dan Peters, Manhattan 8 - UES, supported CERT efforts in Watch Command. He took calls from the teams, making sure that all deployed volunteers were positioned and addressing any issues that arose.

Both of these events allow CERT teams to practice incident command skills such as notification, organization, and span of control, as well as traffic control, establishing a perimeter, and situational awareness.

Feedback from the organizers has been nothing but positive. Keep up the good work, and keep on spreading the word about CERT!

Queens Community Groups Coordinate Emergency Plans

Preparing Rockaway the Right Way



Commissioner Bruno with Ready Rockaway program staff at Peninsula Hospital in Far Rockaway.

On April 22, Ready Rockaway held Part II of its Emergency Preparedness Summit to prepare residents for disasters. OEM Commissioner Joseph Bruno addressed the summit to explain the City's evacuation plans because the City can track the approach of major coastal storms. He articulated the importance of a timely evacuation. The commissioner emphasized that if residents listen and obey warning signs, the evacuation will be successful.

During the Commissioner's remarks he mentioned his strong dedication towards building the NYC CERT teams. "Without fail, these volunteers step right into action when they are asked," he said. "Like a small army, CERT is there to assist first responders and make your communities safer and better prepared."

By Pesach Osina, Queens 14 Team Chief, and Shakira Smalls, Ready Rockaway

CERT Goes Back to School

On April 29, Ramona Ponce, Manhattan 10, and Theresa Okeh, Bronx 4, gave a Ready Schools presentation about emergency preparedness to Alfred Smith High School. Ready Schools is a joint effort between OEM and the NYC Department of Education to teach students the importance of preparing for emergencies through in-school workshops and presentations. Ramona talks about her experience at the school below.

Kids were ushered in groups of either 50 or 100. They were given literature and a pen. After the presentation I helped them fill out the emergency contact card and the pocket guide plan. Timing was free-form, so some of the presentations were 11 minutes, some 20 minutes, and some were half an hour. I didn't know some would be short until a bell announcing the end of class sent the kids scrambling for the door.

Theresa jumped in and did the next couple of presentations. By that point, the speakers and the computer had been hooked up to the DVD player.

The students were engaged and most paid close attention. Their questions were well thought-out. The smart alecks were good-natured. It was a very good group. The steady and grueling turnover of the audience made presenting difficult--this is not for the faint of heart, nor for someone with a quiet voice or laryngitis. I'd highly recommend the event to anyone wanting to practice, practice, practice their presenting skills many times over in a day.

By Ramona Ponce, Manhattan 10

Fall CERT Training

The next round of the 10-week basic CERT training will begin in September. While that is still some months away, team leadership should please stay tuned to your email for interested participants coming to your teams.

Team members can offer to help out by conducting interviews of interested participants. When someone is interested in CERT, their information is sent to the team leadership for them to reach out and interview the person. A form must be submitted for each recruit and can be obtained by contacting cert@oem.nyc.gov.



Queens 12/13 team members Barbara Austin-King and Judith Henry work with OEM Director of Community Outreach Herman Schaffer to set up a Ready NY table at the St. Albans Family Life Center.

On May 4, the Primary Care Development Corporation held an Emergency Preparedness Community Integration Meeting at the St. Albans Family Life Center in Queens.

Local political representatives and community organizations were present to emphasize how critical the need is to have assistance in developing viable emergency plans. These should include not only able-bodied residents of the area, but those who fall through the cracks of the established information stream.

It was initially disturbing to see plans where the only method of keeping the public informed in the event of an emergency was the media. Consistent was the lack of community involvement during the planning stages. However, this was a working meeting, and Queens 12/13 CERT, OEM Director of Community Outreach Herman Schaffer, and other organizations were there to provide definitive actions. In addition, our CERT officers, Barbara Austin-King and Judith Henry, were effective in not only giving examples of how we are educating our communities with this information, but were also able to create connections with the politicians' representatives and the organizations present.

As an active CERT member, part of our charge is educating the community to be ready. This meeting raised the urgency and the importance to another level. If an evacuation of Long Island was necessary, the area covered by Queens 12/13 CERT would be the natural conduit of all forms of transportation. CERT can provide that planning and information conduit between the community and healthcare organizations or agencies before an emergency occurs. If we are effective in creating these relationships now, implementation of disaster plans in our community will be orders of magnitude easier.

By Clive Dawkins, Queens 12/13

CERT Quiz (Summer Edition)

1. What is the "urban heat island" effect?
2. Where can New Yorkers find cooling centers during extended periods of hot weather?
3. What category was the largest hurricane known to have made landfall in the NYC area?

Answers:

1. The effect of the city's infrastructure (asphalt, concrete, and metal) that traps summer heat. The city can be as much as 10 degrees warmer than surrounding areas!
2. When centers are open, they can be found by calling 311 or by visiting the [Cooling Center Locator](#).
3. A category 3 hurricane made landfall in 1938. The eye passed

over Long Island and killed nearly 200 people in the Northeast. For more history about coastal storms, visit [NYC Hurricane History](#).

Announcements

On Wednesday June 30, 133 CERT volunteers will be honored with a graduation ceremony at the Surrogate's Courthouse in Lower Manhattan.

This is the latest group of volunteers to graduate from the 10-week basic CERT training program, and they will go on to join the City's 56 CERT teams and 1,254 CERT volunteers.

Be sure to welcome new members to your teams!

For more information about NYC OEM CERT, log on to the website at www.nyc.gov/cert or call the CERT hotline at (718) 422 - 8585.

CERT is always looking to train motivated individuals to prepare for and respond to emergencies. Anyone looking for more information may contact the CERT hotline or e-mail cert@oem.nyc.gov.

Check out the National FEMA CERT Newsletter: <http://www.citizencorps.gov/cert/newsletter.shtm>

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