

# BRIDGING THE GAP

## CERTS SAVE LIVES AND PROTECT PROPERTY



*“When disaster strikes, civil society is always first in line to offer a hand up to support Albertans through any emergency. This funding will help further enhance the capacity of civil society to provide immediate disaster assistance and bridge the critical gap between the time of disaster and the arrival of emergency services. I am pleased Bridges of Love will be using this funding to share resources and training with organizations across Alberta.”*

*Jason Luan, Minister of Community and Social Services*

The Canadian Federal Government Multi-Hazard plan outlines the processes and mechanism needed for an integrated response to an emergency. The plan is also designed to coordinate emergency response efforts by federal, provincial, and territorial governments as well as the private sector and non-governmental organizations. Most of all, it will help to ensure that the government’s response to an emergency is seamless and timely and that key decisions can be made quickly when disaster strikes.

We are living in unprecedented times with forces of every imaginable disaster, including both natural and human-made, including terrorist attacks. It is not business as usual folks, where we can expect a major event every hundred years! Devastating catastrophic disasters are happening with greater frequency, severity, and impact on communities. It is time to ‘bridge the gap’ between the disaster research and practice; developing safer and more resilient places to live.

There has been so much focus on what is causing an increase in global disasters, but are we putting as much emphasis on how to deal with the effects of the changing extreme weather patterns? Changing climate patterns are being felt around the world, so the predicted is now becoming the predictable. Communities are facing new challenges and experiencing more intense impacts from once familiar hazards.

Is a do-it-yourself approach to planning, which has been the norm for emergency management, still the most effective methodology for building disaster-resilient communities? Can one organization/agency manage the complex events that have become more frequent? While government agencies do their best during emergencies and disasters, they too may be confronted by the consequences limiting their resources and man-power.

A ‘whole-community’ philosophy in its catastrophic preparedness planning, shifts from a ‘government-centric’ response to an approach which considers trained community volunteers as collaborators and partners, as assets rather than liabilities. An effective community-wide emergency response must begin with community-wide planning and preparation through multi-sector collaboration. That partnership results when government, not-for-profit, private, and public organizations, community groups, and individual community members come together to solve problems that impact the whole community. As community builders, more can be accomplished, working together to lay the groundwork for a stronger and more resilient community, that has the capacity to bounce-back with greater speed when incidents occur; then working in isolated silos.

Community residents are often the first on the scene which makes them the first responder. They are in greater proximity to those in need (especially true in a rural setting) and often react quicker than formal organizations. It is important to fully appreciate the value of a community response. Practiced community engagement assist in creating a more resilient community; shifting response from improvisation to coordination, resulting in communities being empowered to take shared responsibility when disaster strikes.

## **Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training, bridging the gap!**

### **1. Who developed CERT and where did this training originate?**

**Answer:** In 1985 the Los Angeles Fire Department developed the CERT program after examining the civilian response to disasters in Mexico and Japan. The LAFD decided to develop and offer disaster response training to LA residents so that during and after future disasters volunteers would be able to assist in a safe, responsible, and effective manner. The LAFD piloted the first CERT training in 1986. In 1994, the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) expanded the CERT materials to include **ALL** hazards and made the program available to communities nationwide and later, world-wide.

### **2. How did Bridges of Love become involved in emergency training?**

**Answer:** Bridges of Love's founding director, Marg Pollon took the CERT US training from the Calgary Emergency Management Agency (CEMA) in 2012. Following the completion of the 3 day course, each participant was given a disc of CERT course materials, including the Instructor's Guide, Student Manual, and PowerPoints. The US trainer stressed that we could use the materials and brand for Canada.

CEMA made the decision to develop their own training materials (Ready Calgary) giving Bridges of Love the go-ahead to develop CERT for Calgary. Bridges of Love (Marg Pollon) spent many months researching, branding, and revising the US materials to make it acceptable for Canadian use. Thanks to grants from the Calgary Foundation, CERT Canada was birthed in 2014 after the training material was reviewed by the Alberta Emergency Management Agency and Public Safety Canada training departments. To date, nine CERT Canada Summits have taken place in Calgary with over 50 CERT graduates completing the course.

### **3. What is Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training?**

**Answer:** CERT is a grass roots strategy that is both practical and realistic strengthening community safety and preparedness through increased civic participation. CERT training gives basic emergency instruction and skills along with CERT equipment, which enables community members to stand in the gap, until the professionals arrive on the scene. Community-based preparedness planning allows all to prepare for and respond to anticipated disruptions and potential hazards following a disaster. CERTs have strict parameters to follow, which restricts their activities, to the basic training they are given. The ability for CERT volunteers to perform these activities frees up professional responders to focus their efforts on more complex, essential, and critical tasks.

### **4. Is CERT training similar to the Red Cross First Aid, CPR, or St. John's Ambulance training?**

**Answer:** The similarity is found in the word "training". CERT is all-hazard training so covers a response for any disaster that might happen in a locality. We offer CERT Medical Disaster Operations training that covers very basic medical information and skills that can save lives. It is not intended as an in-depth study but offers assistance for neighbours helping neighbours, doing the greatest good for the greatest number. We recommend if a CERT wishes to have additional more in-depth training, these options are pursued.

### **5. Can anyone take the CERT Training?**

**Answer:** Definitely, the CERT training is open to anyone over the age of 18 years of age.

### **6. Does CERT provide spiritual or religious instruction during the training?**

**Answer:** No, CERT training is secular in nature. Bridges of Love is a faith-based charity, however, so we like to start our time in prayer, to bless our time together, and we say grace before lunch.

### **7. What is the difference between an 'emergency' and a 'disaster'?**

**Answer:** By definition, emergencies are those events which can be managed by the resident emergency agencies; disasters on the other hand cannot be managed with local resources alone. Disasters overwhelm the

capability of emergency services personnel and can create a sudden and profound change in human systems, at times entirely altering the natural and man-made environment.

**8. Do CERTs respond to an emergency?**

**Answer:** During an initial response to an emergency, most regions have sufficient resources and emergency responders that can respond to emergencies. If a CERT arrives on the scene before the first responders arrive, however, their responsibility is to call 911 if not already contacted, assess the situation and if able to assist to a small fire before it gets out of hand, or save a life by following our basic medical or search and rescue protocol, then CERTs can proceed. CERT training is intended for major events where the systems are over-whelmed. We do not recommend, however, standing by and allowing someone to die, or watch property get destroyed; if there is something that CERTs can do within our training before professionals arrive.

**9. Is there risk involved being a CERT volunteer?**

**Answer:** Taking risks is part of life but having basic training and knowledge minimizes the risk for both the volunteer and those being helped. By nature, people want to assist, so having training and equipment, mitigates the risk by making wise and informed decisions for a “safe” response. As Heather Mack, former Government Relations Director with the Insurance Bureau of Canada stressed at our “Liability and Volunteerism” session – **the Greater Risk is Doing Nothing!**

**10. Do CERTs need to wait to be called by the First Responders?**

**Answer:** No, as CERTs provide an effective first-response capability. Acting as individuals first, then as team members, trained CERT volunteers can fan-out within their assigned areas, extinguish small fires, turn off natural gas at damaged home, perform light search and rescue, and render basic medical treatment and triage. CERTs act as effective “eyes and ears” for uniformed emergency responders. Trained volunteers also offer an important potential workforce to service organizations in non-hazardous support functions.

**11. Do CERT volunteers replace professionally trained emergency personal?**

**Answer:** **Absolutely not!** If available, emergency services personnel are the best trained and equipped to handle emergencies. Following a catastrophic disaster, however, communities may be isolated for an extended period, for a myriad of reason, including the size of the affected area, inoperable communication systems, or unpassable roads so community residents may need to be able to look after themselves for an extended period. After a large-scale disaster, local governments may not have the capacity to manage the over-whelming needs of an entire community.

**12. Does CERT training duplicate other training offered by Municipalities, Province or Private Agencies?**

**Answer:** High River’s CAO shared, *“We do not conduct training amongst the general population but training our core responders who would be in an EOC or on the ground managing the incident. Training of our residents how to respond to an emergency is **not** something we do. We do educate the public what to do in the case of an emergency, what supplies to ensure are on hand and what our role is in any emergency.”*

To our knowledge, there is no training like CERT being offered in Alberta and perhaps across Canada. We are a response organization which is a unique volunteer position.

**13. Has there been any opposition to CERT training and if so, why?**

**Answer:** Yes, a Pastor from the Claresholm Ministerial wrote a letter on behalf of their group stating, *“We see the proactive emergency training (CERT) that Bridges of Love would provide as good, but it might be a hindrance to current emergency communication structures. What we mean by hindrance is that CERT-trained individuals are **not** recognized by local or provincial authorities—this could create liability issues.”*  
Pastor Joseph Steeves

*“What you are trying to do is admirable, but as the Town we need to remain cautious and guarded as it relates to our emergency response. **Response needs to be left to the professionals.** While I know that is not your intent, we do not have control over individuals and how they think or respond in an emergent situation. Emotions can get high and adrenaline rushes during an emergency. When an emergency does happen, people need to look after their own safety and possessions and when told to, evacuate.”*  
Chris Prosser, Chief Operating Officer, High River, AB

**14. Do you see any way around the opposition CERT is experiencing?**

**Answer:** One of the recognized difficulties in building a strong preparedness or mitigation program in any community is the lack of an identifiable political constituency that can recognize, support, and encourage mitigation and preparedness programs in the local government (Wyner and Mann 1986).

Over the years, much time and effort has been spent developing relationships of trust with local authorities in the hope they would cheerlead our cause. Our most successful time was during the start-up phase when Public Safety Canada advocated on our behalf and was actively involved in our planning. Having their support gave credibility and validation to our work which encouraged others in the emergency/health fields to become involved. We collaborated on several very successful workshops and a large Pandemic Summit.

CERT success depends on the passion and commitment of leaders in the community. Our aim is to foster and mould an active community CERT Team model in one neighbourhood, to become the living, breathing example for others to emulate and copy.

**15. What courses are included in the training?**

**Answer:** CERT training offers eight modules which include:

- ✓ Personal Preparedness
- ✓ Fire Safety & Utility Controls
- ✓ Light Search & Rescue
- ✓ Disaster Medical Operations – Unit 1
- ✓ Disaster Medical Operations – Unit 2
- ✓ CERT & Terrorism
- ✓ CERT Operations
- ✓ Psychology of Trauma

**16. Does CERT Canada adhere to existing Canadian Emergency Management protocol?**

**Answer:** **Absolutely!** CERTs recognize and adhere to the structures set up by the Canadian Government. That is that the management of the emergency will be controlled at the lowest level possible (i.e. individual, municipal, provincial, and federal). Local Governments in Alberta are the first responders to an emergency or disaster and they manage the disaster response within their jurisdiction, for its duration.

**17. Are CERTs included in the Municipality structure?**

**Answer:** Not at this time. CERT Canada is still in its infant stage of development. As CERT volunteers prove themselves to be a vital component in disaster response, and the professionals trust and know what to expect from these trained volunteers, we hope this will change.

**18. How many days are included in the CERT training?**

**Answer:** Each module is 1.5 hr. in length. The course is conducted over two full days (four modules for each day). Included is a Friday evening dessert session where a Key-note Speaker shares a special topic. This basic training is only a beginning, however, as we encourage participants to continue learning and expanding their knowledge and expertise as part of their neighbourhood CERT team.

**19. What is the topic for the Friday Key-note Speaker?**

**Answer:** The Friday evening session topic varies with each Summit. Alberta Hazard material is included with the CERT materials so in past Summits, this has been a topic for the Friday evening session (Environment Canada). Other topics that have been included in past CERT Canada Summits included: Pandemic Preparedness, Hail Storms, Volunteerism and Liability, Tornadoes, Disaster Financial Preparedness, and Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP).

**20. What other resources are included in the training?**

**Answer:** Each student is given a binder which includes the course PowerPoints, a CERT memory stick which includes the Student Manual, and other relevant documents, a CERT Certificate, a numbered Photo ID Card, a CERT T-Shirt, CERT Cap, CERT Kit, Friday evening dessert, lunches and snacks/drinks.

**21. What is included in the CERT Kit?**

**Answer:** Again, CERT Canada includes similar equipment in our kits as CERT US. Our kits include –

- |                           |                          |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| ✓ Bag with CERT logo      | ✓ Masks                  |
| ✓ Hard hat with CERT logo | ✓ Light                  |
| ✓ Vest with CERT logo     | ✓ Scissors               |
| ✓ Goggles                 | ✓ CERT documents         |
| ✓ Band-Aids               | ✓ Code of Conduct        |
| ✓ Work and latex gloves   | ✓ CERT bear for children |

**22. Can CERT graduates add items to their kits?**

**Answer:** Certainly! CERT graduates can include additional items to their kits as the bags have room for more.

**23. What is the cost to take the training?**

**Answer:** \$199 per participant  
\$149 for students and those auditing the course.  
10% discount for married couples  
10% discount if one brings a guest

**24. How many participate in each class?**

**Answer:** Our Canadian Head-quarters training centre will hold 12 students comfortably. A smaller class allows for more personal instruction, feed-back, and skills training. Larger groups can be entertained, however, if we hold the training at another location.

**25. Where is the CERT training Headquarters?**

**Answer:** The CERT training Canadian headquarters is in High River, Alberta. #6 – 609 Centre St. SW

**26. Who instructs the various modules?**

**Answer:** Professionals in various fields instruct each module. They have experience, credentials, and stories to tell. Instructors are encouraged to take Bridges of Love's CERT Train-the Trainer course.

**27. What does CERT Train-the-Trainer include?**

**Answer:** About half of the lessons focus on training and skills and half of the lessons focus on review of the CERT Basic Training course. The unit review process involves lecture, demonstration, and participant discovery offered over a two day period.

**28. Do Instructors have to take the CERT Train-the-Trainer training?**

**Answer:** No, but we recommend the two day training as a good introduction to the course material and include best practices for being an effective instructor. The cost for the two days of instruction is \$49.00 and includes lunch and a CERT T-Shirt to be worn when instructing.

**29. Do, Instructors have to be CERT certified?**

**Answer:** Again, the answer is no but we recommend instructors be CERT certified. Instructors can audit the course at no charge.

**30. Do the instructors get paid for their services?**

**Answer:** No, the instructors volunteer their time but they receive an honorarium as a thank you. If expenses are incurred, they are covered by Bridges of Love.

**31. Are there other activities that CERTs can participate?**

**Answer:** CERT volunteer teams can perform basic response activities, including checking in on neighbours, distributing information to the public, supporting their communities by organizing, promoting, and participating in emergency preparedness events, activities, and projects.

**32. After taking the training, do I have to be part of a CERT Team?**

**Answer:** No, after the course is completed, each participant is given a CERT Course Evaluation Form to complete. At the end of the questionnaire, they are asked if they wish to participate on a CERT team in order to continue learning and responding as a team. If they have taken the course to be ready to assist themselves and family only, then they will respond accordingly, and will not be contacted for further engagement.

**33. If I do not wish to be part of a CERT Team, do I require a t-shirt, kit, and cap?**

**Answer:** No, you can audit the course which will include the training materials, Friday evening session, and food but will not include the CERT kit, shirt and cap. The cost to audit the training is \$149.

**34. How are CERTs activated in time of disaster?**

**Answer:** CERTs are self-activated as they are already in the devastated community. They look after themselves and family initially to be sure they are okay, and then they meet at a designated area (Command Post) with other CERT members.

**35. Does CERT include Incident Command System (ICS) training?**

**Answer:** Yes, the CERT Organization module includes an introduction to ICS. Each student is required to complete ICS 100 on-line before they graduate in order to have understanding of this universal emergency command system.

**36. What do CERTs do after the Professionals arrive on the Scene?**

**Answer:** The Team Leader turns all the documentation over to the professionals and share any other information that will help with their efforts. The CERTs have completed their job and can return home or meet for debriefing with their team.

### 37. Are CERTs covered with Liability Insurance under Bridges of Love?

**Answer:** Thanks to a generous donation from one of our CERT graduates, we had Liability Insurance for both our volunteers and Board Directors. Unfortunately, due to insufficient funding at this time, we asked the Cooperators to put our coverage on hold, until we have adequate funding and CERT volunteers to cover.

CERT Volunteers are also covered by Alberta's Emergency Medical Aid Act as long as they strictly adhere to the training they are given.

### 38. Who will lead the CERT Teams and offer further training?

**Answer:** CERTs effectiveness and strength comes from responding to an incident, as a TEAM. CERT personnel assigned to operations should always be assigned to teams consisting to at least 3-4 persons. Each CERT community team, will have a CERT leader who would be responsible for organizing additional training sessions, coordinate meetings and events to keep their group engaged, and coordinate larger events with other teams when an exercise or additional training is offered.

### 39. What is a CERT Affiliate?

**Answer:** CERT has completed the development stage and is now seeking individuals/groups who wish to introduce CERT in their region. Interested parties are asked to complete Bridges of Love Ministry Society's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Canada Affiliate Agreement which is intended to protect Bridges of Love's (BoFL) goals, standards, and mission; providing safety, uniformity and consistency. This agreement also provides protection to our Affiliate's interests, as they promote CERT training in their designated locality.

### 40. What does Bridges of Love share with CERT Affiliates?

**Answer:** Bridges of Love

- ✓ Agrees to share with CERT Canada Affiliate, current CERT Canada training material (Teacher's Manuals, Student Manuals, and PowerPoints, CERT Code of Conduct all duplicated on a CERT Flash Drive. Included: CERT Kit, Cap, Shirt, ID Card, and Certificate) as samples for duplication.
- ✓ Agrees to provide all CERT Train-the-Trainer Teacher Manuals, Student Manuals, and PowerPoints.
- ✓ Agrees to include Affiliates in any activities and provide additional resources to assist with the start-up phase.
- ✓ Agrees to collaborate with CERT Affiliates to determine best practices and consider changes or improvements in the CERT training program.
- ✓ Agrees to provide space on our CERT Website (bridgesoflove.ca) to promote CERT Affiliate Training and events.
- ✓ Agrees **NOT** to be responsible for any liability issues that might occur from CERT Affiliate activities, training, or from those incurred from their CERT trainers/volunteers.
- ✓ Agrees to issue Tax Receipts for a 10% administration fee to cover accounting costs.

### 41. What is the cost to become a CERT Affiliate?

**Answer:** Bridges of Love asks for a \$500 a year CERT Affiliate Membership fee to help with its over-head expenses for operations and facility. Since this is not a donation, a Tax Receipt will not be issued.

### 42. Does Bridges of Love have any CERT Affiliates at this time?

**Answer:** Yes, in December 2019 Bob Davies, RMD Safety signed a CERT Affiliate Agreement for Edmonton and GEA. He renewed the agreement in 2020 but due to the Pandemic he has not had an opportunity to offer the training. Now that COVID restrictions have been lifted, however, Bob looks forward to sharing CERT with his region.

**If you have additional question/s, please do not hesitate to contact Bridges of Love.  
Please call our office at 403.649.0087 or Marg's cell number at 403.616.0536.**