



LOS ANGELES COUNTY ANNUAL REPORT

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When Disaster Strikes: Volunteers at the Ready



Preparation is essential when a major disaster strikes L.A. County, and the Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) remains ready to jump into action. Six CERT teams from throughout the County converged on the Castaic Training Facility to compete in the 4th Annual CERT Invitational.

"Well, we're just ordinary volunteers," CERT Michael Stajura said. "We're lay responders, we're at the lowest level of training. But we have enough knowledge to safely and effectively help ourselves, help our neighbors. It could be the guy in line next to you at the grocery store."

This all-day event has each team competing in six separate first response categories, testing their skills and knowledge.

"Most of the time it's just looking at pictures of things. It's all classroom-based, lecture style. This is our opportunity to put hands on, and to demonstrate the skills that we've practiced for," says one CERT volunteer.

Pablo Valadez, L.A. County Fire's Senior Disaster Services Analysis explains, "So the judges of the different stations are made up of people from different areas as well. They are actually out serving the whole operation and able to rate the teams in safety, technical skills, knowledge, communication, and team leadership."

Modeled under the framework of Neighbors Helping Neighbors, CERT volunteers say this friendly, but very serious competition, is as close to the real thing as it gets.

"So we have been a little bit surprised by some of the events when we've actually gotten there, but that's part of the process; to be flexible and be ready to roll, however the scenario looks," CERT volunteer Lisa Tabor said.