

North Dakota Department of Emergency Services

North Dakota CERT & Teen CERT Program Guide



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Section 1: Program Overview

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program is a nationally recognized initiative coordinated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Its mission is to harness the power of every individual through education, training, and volunteer service to make communities safer, stronger, and better prepared to respond to emergencies and disasters of all kinds.

In North Dakota, the Department of Emergency Services (NDDDES) administers the North Dakota Citizen Corps Council, CERT, and Teen CERT programs. NDDDES is committed to building a statewide network of trained community volunteers who can support professional first responders when it matters most.

About the CERT Program

CERT prepares community members to safely assist their families, neighbors, and fellow citizens before professional help arrives. The 20-hour CERT Basic Training course — taught by trained first responders who have completed a CERT Train-the-Trainer course — covers:

- Disaster preparedness and hazard awareness
- Basic fire safety and suppression
- Disaster medical operations
- Light search and rescue
- Disaster psychology and team organization

CERT graduates who want to take a more active role can join a CERT team, participate in community service activities, and serve as a force multiplier for professional responders during declared emergencies. For an online introduction to the program, FEMA offers IS-317: Introduction to CERT, available at:

<https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=is-317>

About the Teen CERT Program

Teen CERT applies the same core curriculum to middle and high school students, preparing the next generation of community leaders and responders. Teen CERT participants learn fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. They are encouraged to support emergency preparedness projects in their schools and communities.

NDDDES recognizes that youth CERT graduates carry these skills for a lifetime. Teen CERT is therefore NDDDES's primary funding focus within the CERT program.

North Dakota's CERT Focus

The primary goal of NDDDES is to provide the resources necessary to sustain and grow Teen CERT across North Dakota. The rationale is straightforward: Teen CERT graduates go on to:

- Assist family, friends, neighbors, and classmates during emergencies
- Take an active role in community preparedness projects
- Pursue careers or long-term volunteer service in emergency response disciplines
- Provide a lifetime of community service

CERT and Teen CERT classes may be conducted solely for educational purposes without establishing a formal team. While NDDES recommends establishing teams to aid in preparedness and response, educational-only classes are fully supported and valuable.

Partner Programs

CERT is one of five federally sponsored Citizen Corps partner programs. The others are available to North Dakota communities as complementary volunteer resources:

- Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) —

[fema.gov/cert](https://www.fema.gov/cert)

- Fire Corps — citizen advocates supporting resource-constrained fire and rescue departments

[firecorps.org](https://www.firecorps.org)

- National Neighborhood Watch — information, training, and resources for citizens and law enforcement

[nnw.org](https://www.nnw.org)

- Medical Reserve Corps — medical and public health volunteers supporting local emergencies. The ND Public Health Emergency Volunteer Reserve (PHEVR/MRC) is administered by ND Health and Human Services:

hhs.nd.gov/phevr-mrc

- Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS) — enhancing state and local law enforcement capacity through volunteers

theiacp.org/vips

The Citizen Corps Council

A Citizen Corps Council is a coalition of public and private sector partners who help establish and sustain community preparedness programs including CERT, VIPS, Neighborhood Watch, Medical Reserve Corps, and Fire Corps.

The North Dakota Citizen Corps Council is sponsored by NDDES and includes partners from emergency management, law enforcement, the North Dakota Firefighters Association, and ND Health and Human Services. Establishing a local Citizen Corps Council is a prerequisite for forming a CERT team. Requirements and procedures are detailed in Section 2.

Section 2: Standard Operating Procedures

Citizen Corps Council Requirements

To establish and maintain a local Citizen Corps Council, the following are required:

1. Register your council on the FEMA CERT website and keep registration current on an annual basis:

[fema.gov/cert](https://www.fema.gov/cert)

2. Submit a bi-annual report to NDDES. Reports are due June 30 and December 31 each year. Submit reports to the Citizen Corps point of contact listed on the NDDES website:

des.nd.gov/cert

CERT Team Organizational Requirements

Forming a formal CERT team is not required. CERT and Teen CERT classes may be conducted for educational purposes only, and NDDES encourages this. Where communities or schools wish to establish an active team, the following requirements apply. Teen CERT programs taught within a school curriculum and classes conducted solely for public education purposes are exempt from requirements 1 and 2 below.

3. Register your CERT program on the FEMA CERT website and maintain registration annually:

[fema.gov/cert](https://www.fema.gov/cert)

4. Submit bi-annual reports to NDDES by June 30 and December 31. Report forms are available in the NDDES Resource Library:

des.nd.gov/resource-library

5. All information collected through required forms or as part of these guidelines is privileged and confidential, and shall not be released to any outside organization pursuant to applicable federal, state, local, or tribal law.

Background Checks

All CERT team coordinators, Lead Instructors, Unit Instructors, and volunteers age 18 and older must complete a background check before beginning any CERT team activities beyond the Basic CERT course. Background checks are not required before starting the Basic CERT class itself.

The following individuals are exempt from the background check requirement:

- Coordinators, trainers, and volunteers who were active CERT team or Citizen Corps Council members before April 1, 2015
- Currently licensed active law enforcement officers
- Currently licensed elementary and secondary educators
- Unit instructors used in an in-school Teen CERT program who are under the supervision of a teacher or Lead Instructor

Persons convicted of a felony offense or a crime of violence, or the threat of violence will not be accepted as volunteer CERT members.

New coordinators, trainers, and volunteers must sign and submit a background check authorization form to the NDDDES Citizen Corps point of contact. Authorization forms are available in the NDDDES Resource Library. Team coordinators will maintain a record of each volunteer's name and background check results.

All adult leaders, as defined in Section 4, must have background checks complete before participating in any Teen CERT activities.

Liability Waivers and Informed Consent

All CERT team coordinators, Lead Instructors, Unit Instructors, and volunteers age 18 and older must sign and submit an Informed Consent, Waiver, and Release of Liability Agreement. Teen CERT volunteers must return a signed Parent or Guardian Agreement of Informed Consent, Waiver, and Release of Liability. For classes conducted as part of an approved school curriculum, a single form signed by the school superintendent or principal serves as the release for all participants and activities within that curriculum.

Team coordinators must send electronic copies of signed forms to the NDDDES Citizen Corps point of contact and retain signed originals for the duration of the member's participation plus three years afterward. Release of Liability forms are available in the NDDDES Resource Library:

des.nd.gov/resource-library

Note: Liability waivers document that members understand the risks of CERT activities and choose to participate. While waivers may not be fully enforceable in all circumstances under North Dakota law, they are a meaningful risk management tool. For more information on liability and risk management in CERT programs, see the FEMA CERT Liability Guide.

Member Records

Team coordinators must maintain the following records for each active member:

- Name and contact information
- Date of graduation from CERT Basic Training
- Active or inactive status
- Role within the team or program
- Hours of service
- Supplemental training and exercises completed, with dates
- Equipment issued
- Special skills and abilities

For educational-only classes, records need only include each participant's name and date of graduation. All member records must be retained for three years after the volunteer completes Basic CERT training or ceases to be an active member, whichever is later.

Safety

The safety of volunteers and the public is the highest priority in all CERT activities. Volunteers must report all unsafe situations, activities, or practices immediately and take appropriate protective action. Any injury suffered or witnessed during an assigned task must be reported immediately to the Incident Commander, team coordinator, or instructor.

Scope of Practice

CERT volunteers must operate within their CERT training. Skills beyond the CERT curriculum — such as those of medical professionals or heavy equipment operators — may be valuable in other contexts but are not authorized CERT activities. The following are also prohibited during CERT activities:

- Possession or use of a firearm or other weapon
- Self-deployment to emergencies where the volunteer is not immediately involved or requested
- Reporting for duty under the influence of alcohol or any substance that impairs judgment or physical functioning
- Failure to follow rules, regulations, and orders from higher authority

CERT members found acting outside their CERT mission or engaging in prohibited activities are subject to immediate removal from the incident, activity, or class and may be terminated from the program.

Spontaneous Incidents

NDDDES recognizes that a volunteer may encounter an emergency in their home, neighborhood, or workplace during normal daily activities. In such spontaneous situations, CERT volunteers:

- Should ensure that emergency response authorities have been contacted with accurate information
- May render assistance within their current training and abilities
- Must relinquish command of the scene to professional authorities upon their arrival and may render further assistance as requested by incident command

Volunteers are prohibited from self-deploying to routine emergencies in which they are not immediately involved or have not been requested. Inappropriate self-deployment is a barrier to proper emergency response and may result in suspension or termination from the program.

CERT Team Funding

NDDDES provides the following funding support for CERT and Teen CERT programs:

Workers' Compensation Insurance

NDDDES will pay the initial (first-year) Workforce Safety and Insurance premium for new CERT teams. Subsequent years are the responsibility of the sponsoring jurisdiction or agency.

Teen CERT Funding

For Teen CERT programs specifically, NDDDES will fund:

- Instructor fees for training classes and exercises. Compensation is limited to a maximum of \$19 per hour plus mileage for volunteer instructors. Each request is handled on a case-by-case basis.
- Basic CERT kits for graduates of the course, provided by NDDDES.
- Up to \$300 per year in exercise supplies.

Reimbursement request forms are available in the NDDDES Resource Library:

des.nd.gov/resource-library

Homeland Security Grant Funding

Local jurisdictions may apply for funding through the Homeland Security Grant Program to conduct regular CERT courses. Approved expenditures include instructor fees, materials and supplies, basic CERT kits (ordered through NDDDES), and travel expenses.

EMI Course Reimbursement

North Dakota residents attending NDDDES-sponsored G0427 (CERT Program Manager) or G0428 (CERT Train-the-Trainer) courses at FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI) in Emmitsburg, MD, will be reimbursed for meals and lodging at state rates. Participants must travel more than 50 miles from their home or work address to be eligible.

Instructor and Training Course Requirements

Lead Instructor Qualification

Each CERT team coordinator or their designated representative must complete the G0428 Community Emergency Response Team Train-the-Trainer course. NDDDES offers this course in-state at least once per calendar year. It is also offered at FEMA's EMI. Contact the NDDDES Training and Exercise section for scheduling information.

Team coordinators and Lead Instructors who were teaching the CERT course prior to June 1, 2015 are exempt from this requirement pending NDDDES approval. Approval may be granted based on direct observation by an NDDDES employee or a demonstrated record of instructional competence — for example, a primary or secondary teaching certification, POST Board approval, ICS instructor certification, or a video submission of the instructor teaching a CERT course unit. Submit approval requests to the NDDDES Citizen Corps point of contact.

Lead Instructors must complete the G0428 course once every three calendar years, or demonstrate continuing education in subject areas relevant to CERT operations (such as POST or EMS board-approved classes, or FEMA Independent Study courses). This continuing education record must be submitted to the NDDDES Citizen Corps point of contact.

Unit Instructors

A Unit Instructor is any person requested by the Lead Instructor to teach an individual course unit. Unit Instructors are not required to complete G0428, though it is strongly encouraged. NDDDES highly recommends recruiting active law enforcement, firefighting, and EMS personnel to serve as Unit Instructors. Lead Instructors must maintain a record of all Unit Instructors utilized for each course, kept for a minimum of three years.

Curriculum and Evaluations

Lead and Unit Instructors must use the NDDDES-approved CERT syllabus. The syllabus and course organization checklist are available in the NDDDES Resource Library. Upon completion of each course, Lead Instructors must have participants complete a course evaluation. Copies of evaluations must be submitted to the NDDDES Citizen Corps point of contact. Classes taught as part of an approved school curriculum are exempt from this requirement. Evaluation forms are available in the NDDDES Resource Library:

des.nd.gov/resource-library

Program Manager Training

Team coordinators are encouraged to complete the G0427 Community Emergency Response Team Program Manager Course, offered in-state by NDDDES at least once per calendar year and at FEMA's EMI. Contact the NDDDES Training and Exercise section for more information.

Training Records

Lead Instructors must maintain records of all persons who complete a CERT course. These records must be kept for a minimum of three years. Thorough training records protect the program by documenting that appropriate training was provided, which is important in the event a claim is ever made against a team or volunteer.

Section 3: Non-Discrimination Policy

It is the policy of NDDDES that no member shall be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination in any Citizen Corps, CERT, or Teen CERT program or activity on the basis of race, sex, age, color, religion, national origin, or disability.

This policy applies to all program activities, including recruitment, training, team participation, and termination. All program materials, application forms, and selection processes must comply with applicable federal and state non-discrimination law. Application forms should not include questions about age, race, religion, national origin, pregnancy, disability, health conditions, or prior workers' compensation claims.

Section 4: Teen CERT Protection Policies

NDDDES conducts its Teen CERT program in a positive, safe, and age-appropriate environment that emphasizes good citizenship. Teen CERT participants will have opportunities to lead, encounter challenges, and have fun.

Zero-Tolerance Policy on Abuse

NDDDES has zero tolerance for physical, sexual, or emotional abuse in any of its programs. NDDDES will report to law enforcement all reasonable suspicions of child abuse and other criminal activity as required by local, state, and federal law and will cooperate fully with law enforcement investigations. Where professional responsibilities create a legal duty to report suspicions of child abuse to local authorities, that duty governs NDDDES's conduct.

This policy applies to all NDDDES employees, CERT and Teen CERT coordinators, members, and instructors. When guest speakers and visitors interact with Teen CERT participants, NDDDES personnel will supervise to ensure that all interactions conform to basic, socially acceptable norms of professional conduct.

Definition of Adult Leader

For purposes of this section, an adult leader is any NDDDES employee, NDDDES contractor, CERT or Teen CERT coordinator, or instructor over the age of 18 who is participating in or supervising any Teen CERT activity.

Professional Boundaries

Because adult leaders have inherent supervisory authority over Teen CERT participants, adult leaders will not date or pursue any intimate romantic relationship with a Teen CERT participant at any time, regardless of circumstances.

All Teen CERT activities will be open to parental observation. Closed meetings are not permitted. NDDDES personnel will make reasonable accommodations to allow parents open access during all activities. Some environments — such as simulated disaster exercises or active in-school classes — may limit parent access to designated times and areas. In all cases, the individual school district's policies and procedures take precedence.

Supervision Standards

Every Teen CERT participant activity must be supervised by at least two adult leaders, at least one of whom has passed the background check required in Section 2. When classes are conducted as part of an approved in-school curriculum, only the Lead or Unit Instructor or the assigned classroom teacher is required to be present. School district policies and procedures take precedence in all cases.

Supervisors who do not have direct line-of-sight contact with Teen CERT participants must nonetheless remain aware of where participants are, what they are doing, and check on them regularly.

One-on-One Interactions

Adult leaders who need to mentor or counsel participants individually during official activities should do so in the presence of a third person whenever reasonably possible. One-on-one meetings are permitted if conducted in a semi-open setting — for example, with a door kept ajar or in a location visible to the group. Participants and adult leaders are prohibited from meeting privately in a fully closed environment.

Favoritism

Adult leaders are expected to make a good-faith effort to avoid favoritism and to support each participant equitably.

Social Media and Electronic Communication

When adult leaders interact with participants via social media, they will make reasonable efforts to limit participants' exposure to personal, non-CERT, or non-professional content. When communicating with Teen CERT participants between official activities, adult leaders will use email or social media platforms visible to other members whenever possible. If using email, adult leaders will copy another adult leader except for very brief official messages or distribute the message to two or more participants.

Texting, private messaging, and similar one-to-one electronic communications are permitted only for very brief messages of an official nature. Telephone and video contact with participants is permitted during non-school hours.

Contact Outside Official Activities

Normally, significant contact between adult leaders and participants outside of official Teen CERT activities is not permitted. NDDDES recognizes, however, that some contact may occur legitimately in the following circumstances:

- Brief conversations resulting from chance encounters in the community are permitted.
- Non-romantic relationships that pre-existed one party's involvement in CERT or Teen CERT (such as family, neighbors, or coworkers) are not improper and may continue.
- Professional relationships (such as teacher/student, doctor/patient, or clergy/congregant) are not improper, and substantial contact may occur within the context of that professional relationship.
- Mutual membership in another organization is not improper and contact during that organization's activities is permitted.
- When participants become personal friends of an adult leader's family, the adult leader's interactions with that participant in a non-CERT capacity are not improper. All NDDDES/CERT standards of practice continue to apply during Teen CERT activities.

Section 5: Personnel and Team Termination Procedures

Definitions

Membership in CERT and Teen CERT is a privilege, not a right.

- **Member:** Any individual or team participating in Citizen Corps, CERT, or Teen CERT.
- **Approving Authority:** The NDDDES point of contact (or designee) for the Citizen Corps, CERT, and Teen CERT programs.

Standards for Continued Membership

Members must continue to meet all eligibility criteria, comply with all applicable laws, policies, guidelines, and regulations, and conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the standards set forth in this guide. If a team coordinator, program manager, or NDDDES representative determines at any time that continued membership is contrary to the best interests of the Citizen Corps, CERT, or Teen CERT program, the member may be terminated.

Grounds for Termination

Voluntary Resignation

Members wishing to resign must do so in writing and sign the resignation request.

Failure to Respond

Failure to respond within 45 days to a request for additional background information is grounds for termination.

Termination for Cause

Members whose conduct, behavior, or effectiveness fails to meet the standards in this guide may be terminated for cause. Termination for cause may be justified by the seriousness of a single incident or by a pattern of repeated minor incidents. Causes include:

- Conduct involving moral turpitude
- Conduct unbecoming a member of CERT or Teen CERT
- Financial irresponsibility involving Citizen Corps, CERT, or Teen CERT assets
- Substance impairment that affects the ability to perform duties or that occurs during CERT activities
- Habitual failure to perform duties
- Making a false statement to or about Citizen Corps, CERT, or Teen CERT
- Serious or willful violations of program regulations, directives, or guidelines
- Substandard performance of duties over an extended period
- Failure to obey rules, regulations, and orders from higher authority
- Insubordination
- Sexual harassment or any conduct of a sexual nature prohibited under program policy or applicable law

- Any other conduct that violates the guidelines in this document, provided the reason for termination is clearly stated in the notification letter

Termination Process

Team coordinators or local program managers should initiate termination action in appropriate cases. NDDDES may initiate termination procedures independently if it has knowledge of conduct warranting termination. A termination action may be withdrawn by the initiating party at any time before the process is complete.

When termination is determined to be appropriate, the following procedures will be followed:

6. The initiating party notifies the member by letter, stating each appropriate charge and a brief statement of the supporting facts.
7. Within 10 days of the termination decision, the notification letter must be delivered personally to the member or mailed by both certified mail and regular mail to the member's address of record. A copy of the letter is simultaneously sent to the NDDDES point of contact.
8. Upon receiving notice of a proposed termination, the member is placed in suspended status and may not participate in or represent Citizen Corps, CERT, or Teen CERT in any capacity until the process is concluded.
9. Members who do not appeal need only return any CERT or Teen CERT property in their possession to the team coordinator, program manager, or NDDDES.

Appeal Procedures

Members terminated for cause are entitled to appeal. The appeal process is as follows:

10. The member must notify both the initiating party and the NDDDES point of contact in writing of their intent to appeal within 30 days of personal delivery of the termination letter (or 30 days after the postmark, if mailed). Failure to do so forfeits the right to appeal and concludes the termination action.
11. The member remains in suspended status throughout the appeal process.
12. Within 10 days of receiving a timely appeal, the Approving Authority will appoint an appeal board of at least three NDDDES employees and designate a chairperson. The NDDDES Citizen Corps point of contact may not serve on an appeal board.
13. The initiating party will provide the board chairperson and the member with a full statement of circumstances, including the notification letter and all pertinent documents.
14. The chairperson will set a hearing date and location, normally within 30 days of the board's appointment, and will notify both parties in writing at least 15 days before the hearing. The chairperson may grant continuances at their discretion.
15. A verbatim record of the hearing is not required. If the member is granted permission to record proceedings, a copy must be provided to the chairperson within the period the chairperson specifies.

16. The hearing is informal. The chairperson rules on questions of relevancy, materiality, and admissibility. Both parties may call witnesses, cross-examine adverse witnesses, and present written statements. The member has the right to appear in person with or without an advisor of their choosing, to testify, or to submit their case in writing.
17. After the hearing, board members will make findings of fact and recommendations by majority vote. Dissenting members must note their dissent in writing, which is attached to the board's report.
18. The chairperson forwards the board's report and all attachments to the Approving Authority, normally within 10 days of the hearing's close.
19. The Approving Authority reviews the report and takes final action, normally within 10 days of receipt. If the board recommends retention, the Approving Authority may not impose termination. If the board recommends termination, the Approving Authority may approve or disapprove that recommendation. The member is notified of the final decision by letter.

Privacy must be maintained throughout the disciplinary and appeal process. Disciplinary matters should be handled in private settings with only the member, supervisor, and a witness present. Member files must be stored securely.

Section 6: Program Feedback and Complaint Resolution

Feedback

Constructive feedback on any aspect of the North Dakota CERT or Teen CERT program is welcome and encouraged. Feedback may be directed to the Citizen Corps point of contact listed on the NDDes website:

des.nd.gov/cert

Complaint Resolution Program

The NDDes complaint resolution program is designed to prevent, detect, and correct fraud, waste, and abuse (FWA); mismanagement or program deficiencies; acts of reprisal or restriction; and participant protection issues.

Reporting Obligations

All Citizen Corps members, CERT and Teen CERT members, and adult leaders have a responsibility to report the following to the NDDes point of contact:

- Fraud, waste, or abuse involving program resources or activities
- Violations of program policies or directives
- Abuse of authority
- Participant protection issues or misconduct
- Any known violations of local, state, tribal, or federal law

Complaints involving sexual abuse or other criminal conduct must be reported to the appropriate civilian law enforcement agencies in accordance with state law. Any such complaints received by NDDes will be referred immediately to the appropriate law enforcement authorities.

Who May File a Complaint

Citizen Corps members, CERT and Teen CERT members, adult leaders, and parents or legal guardians of Teen CERT members all have the right to file complaints under this section. All allegations of FWA may be accepted regardless of source.

How to Submit a Complaint

All complaints should be submitted in writing, dated, and signed by the complainant. The complainant's signature affirms that all information provided is true and correct to the best of their knowledge. Complaints must be accompanied by all available supporting documentation.

Verbal or email complaints should be followed up with a signed written submission within 14 days of the original notification.

Anonymous complaints are accepted. Email and voice complaints submitted anonymously do not require a written follow-up. However, anonymous complaints alone are never treated as evidence of a violation and may only be acted upon if the complaint reveals independent evidence of a violation of NDDes guidelines or applicable law.

Resolution Process

NDDDES will receive and process complaints from any source via any medium. Complaints will be resolved through referral, transfer, dismissal, direct assistance, or investigation. NDDDES will maintain a record of all contacts and the rationale for the resolution strategy selected in each case.

Section 7: Key Contacts and Resources

NDDDES Citizen Corps and CERT

des.nd.gov/cert

NDDDES Resource Library

Forms, syllabi, course checklists, reimbursement requests, and release of liability documents:

des.nd.gov/resource-library

NDDDES Training and Exercise

des.nd.gov/training

FEMA CERT Program

fema.gov/cert

FEMA IS-317: Introduction to CERT

training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=is-317

FEMA CERT Liability Guide

A comprehensive risk management overview for local CERT programs, covering liability exposure, risk management strategies, insurance, volunteer protection laws, and best practices. Available at:

fema.gov/cert (Resources section)

ND Public Health Emergency Volunteer Reserve (PHEVR/MRC)

<http://www.ndhealth.gov/epr/hp/phevr/>

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