



Community Emergency Response Team members treat “victims” of an earthquake during a June 3 drill. In 2017, about 300 Sequim area residents joined the CERT program and fire officials with Clallam County Fire District 3 hope to get hundreds more in the coming year. Sequim Gazette file photo by Michael Dashiell

Sequim’s CERT program grows to 300 trainees

By Matthew Nash

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Sequim residents are following the Boy Scouts’ motto to be prepared.

Officials with Clallam County Fire District 3 report they’ve trained close to 300 Sequim-area residents for Community Emergency Response Teams in the past year.

Fire crew leaders’ goal was to have trained 20 teams with 400 people across Sequim, but they are still encouraged by the results so far.

“We’re thrilled,” said Assistant Chief Dan Orr. “Before, we only had one team in Emerald Highlands, who decided to go through the program again. Now we have 11 teams from Gardiner to Deer Park and our first in the city limits.”

Blaine Zechenelly, disaster planning/EMT for the fire district, said they have at least 24 more trainees slated to begin training in January.

“I think we’ve achieved a phenomenal level,” he said. “I would have thought a 150 people is a reasonable attempt. Our goal is to add several hundred more.”

What they’re training for ranges from wildfires to catastrophic earthquakes, specifically the Cascadia Subduction Zone, a predicted 9.0 magnitude earthquake.

“I think people are realistically looking at (Cascadia) and know it might happen but (CERT) isn’t just about the worst case scenario. It’s anything,” Zechenelly said.

He said recently there was a multiple-vehicle wreck in Gardiner that a CERT volunteer assisted a Washington State Trooper controlling traffic after arriving early on scene.

Making an impact

Since starting, CERT volunteers have worked more than 13,000 hours, which Zechenelly said is a “huge statement by our people.”

Charlie Meyer, CERT squad leader for the Carlsborg area and a leader with emergency preparedness at Sequim Community Church, said Sequim has defined the need for preparedness better than most Washington counties.

“We understand our risks,” Meyer said. “We have a two-lane road with many people who depend on it as a supply line. In the aftermath (of a disaster), there will be a lot of islands and dropped bridges.”

Meyer and Zechenelly say Sequim is making progress on preparing for the worst.

“It’s a very large problem that we’re chewing away at,” Meyer said. “Other areas in the state could look to us as an example.”

With so many possible situations in a disaster scenario, fire officials say first responders will likely be spread thin and far apart.

“These volunteers (who are now being trained in urban search and rescue classes too) are the first person to touch you,” Zechenelly said, “and they may not reach you for days.”

All-ages

Ideally, fire officials hope to train 600-700 people to cover Eastern Clallam County.

“With the number of resources needed, we’ve just started to scratch the surface of this effort,” Zechenelly said. “No one should believe we’re close to 100 percent.”

But being prepared isn’t only a young person’s game, Meyer said.

“Some people feel, I’m old. How much help can I be?” he said. “But if they can walk, they can administer first aid or check out a building. They’re potentially a help. Folks who are HAM radio operators can be too.”

For Meyer, he’s found CERT as a way to stay active and to help out after retiring.

“It’s a way for a retiree who doesn’t normally go to work every morning to feel connected,” he said. “It serves the community in a real way.”

The CERT program, fire officials say, teaches a variety of things such as search and rescue, minor fire suppression and first aid.

Nancy McGovern, retired registered nurse after 44 years, works with Meyer in Carlsborg and said having volunteers is important because there are a lot of areas to be checked including her area with more than 450 homes.

Helping hands

McGovern said CERT has “been one of the most rewarding things I could have thought to do.”

“I’ve met some great people and now I feel like I know a little bit more about my neighbors,” she said.

But why would a retired nurse need emergency training?

McGovern said in a hospital, ample supplies for every situation abound with the goal to “do everything they can for every person.”

After a disaster though, “it’s the greatest good for the greatest amount of people because you can’t save everyone,” she said.

McGovern, who worked about six years in an emergency trauma room as a head nurse said in a situation like a Cascadia earthquake, you have to be creative to help.

“I don’t have medical supplies for 400 homes,” she said. “In a home I’ll look for pillows or bed sheets. If I’m going to stabilize a head, I’ll use a towel.”

With response times cut back depending on the level of the disaster, McGovern said local residents are encouraged to have at least 30 days of supplies including water, food, and medication.

“Chief Orr tells us all the time who is No. 1. We are. We are an asset,” she said. “If we don’t take care of each other and the team then we are of no good to the neighborhood.”

For McGovern, she says training under CERT is important because the impact of something like the Cascadia earthquake could be huge.

“Whether it happens in my lifetime or for someone in their middle years, one of the two of us is going to see this and preparation is everything,” she said. “If you’re prepared for something, you’re more likely to survive. You need a mindset that there are people that might need you.”

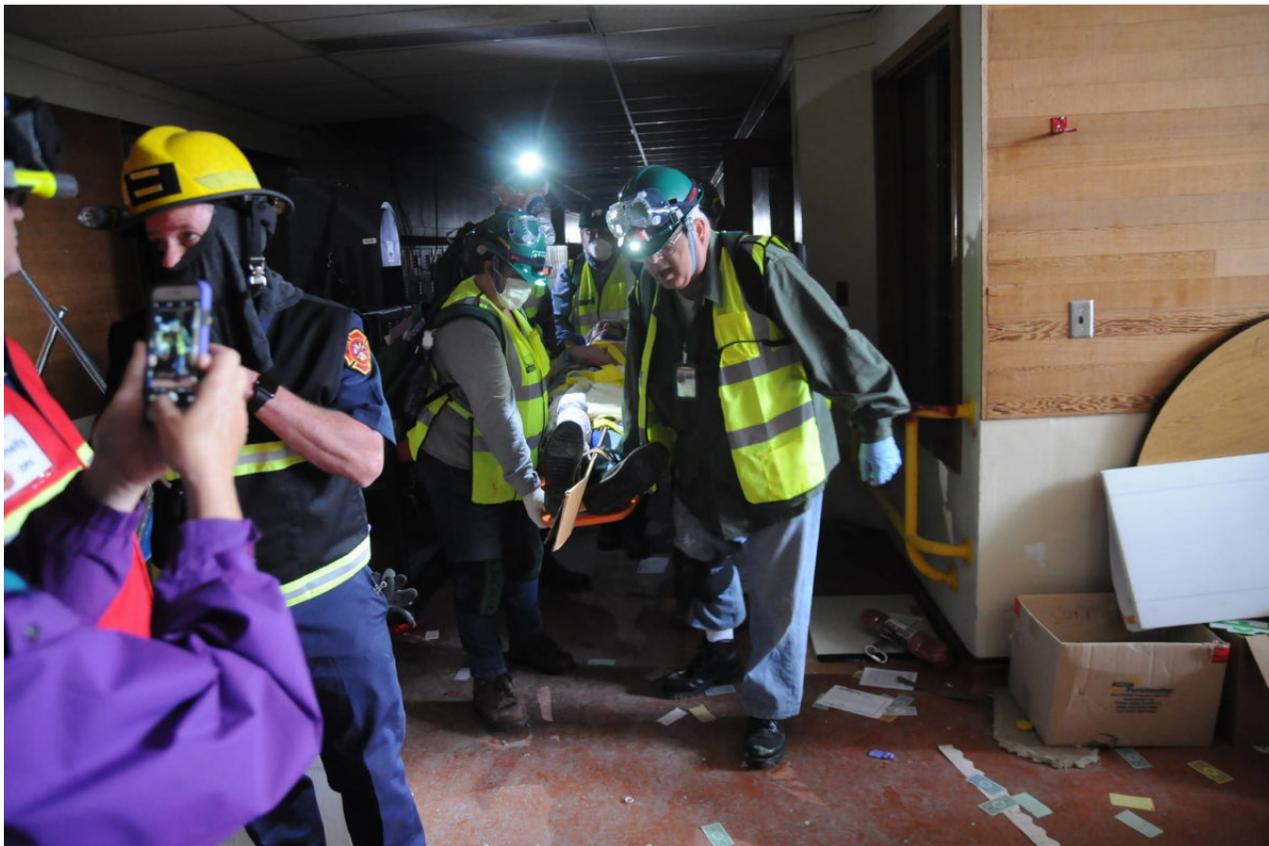
Training

Sessions are ongoing depending on interest for CERT. For January, sessions run 8 a.m.-5 p.m. On Jan. 13, 20, and 27 with the first two sessions at Station 34, 323 N. Fifth Ave., and the third at the Carlsborg Fire Station. Typically,

sessions are held on the second, third and fourth Saturdays of the month. If interested, contact Cindy Zechenelly at 360-504-2531 or 360-683-4242 or visit ccfd3.org.

The Dungeness Hospital Guild hosts Orr to discuss training for first responders at its monthly meeting at 10 a.m. Tuesday, Jan. 23, in the fellowship room of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 525 N. Fifth Ave.

Reach Matthew Nash at mnash@sequimgazette.com.



CERT members search the west end of the Sequim Community School for earthquake “survivors” during a June 3 drill. Sequim Gazette file photo by Michael Dashiell



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On Oct. 30, locals train for for 24 hours over three Saturdays at Sequim Community Church on how to fight small fires, conduct search operations, and conduct basic first aid in a disaster scenario for the Community Emergency Response Teams, CERT, program. If interested in becoming a CERT Member, contact District 3 at 360-683-4242. Photo courtesy of Clallam County Fire District 3

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