

San Francisco Fire Department Neighborhood Emergency Response Team (NERT) Block Captain Overview

NERT is San Francisco's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program. This block captain training was designed to better meet the need in the NERT program for improved coordination within individual neighborhoods. Ultimately this will allow them to better assist emergency responders and provide more widespread assessment information following a disaster. Expansion of teams to create a more effective response within their own neighborhood is crucial. The teams need better contact with a broader spectrum of their neighbors as well as a plan to communicate and report their neighborhood's need after a catastrophic event.

This program established a Block Captain program within NERT. NERT, in coordination with San Francisco Safety Awareness for Everyone (SF SAFE), San Francisco's leading crime-prevention education organization, created a training curriculum that resulted in the establishment of NERT block captains to coordinate individual neighborhood responses to a disaster event.

This program is based on a 3-hour Personal Preparedness/Block Captain Training Workshop. Citizens reluctant or too busy to commit to standard NERT 20-hour training course will have the foundation of preparedness instruction that is so crucial to the Federal CERT curriculum. This training gives the basics that they need to personally prepare for a disaster, large or small. It also establishes a meaningful way to affiliate and contribute in a coordinated response to disaster. People who attend this session are given credit for Module 1 of NERT training as an incentive to get them further involved.

Upon completion of the training participants develop and submit a block communication plan. At that time, they are issued a block response kit. The protocols establish activation of the block communication plan and use of an "emergency flag status kit" to assess the needs of the block following a disaster. Consistent with the San Francisco NERT response plan, the block will deliver a damage assessment form to the NERT staging post in their neighborhood. The NERT staging posts will be in direct communication with the Fire Battalion Stations and prioritize delivery of the message with life safety considerations first. Current NERT neighborhood coordinators, who will activate the staging posts, received training in the block captain response protocols.

This project focused on NERT graduates and San Francisco residents at large. The project served to increase retention and participation of NERT graduates in continued planning and participation prior to a catastrophic event, as well as to engage citizens who have not taken the NERT training but can be a vital resource in case of disaster. The Neighborhood Watch organization was a natural partner since they already assist blocks in organizing around crime issues. Many of their groups express interest in learning how to become ready for disaster but have not yet taken the NERT training. This workshop helps them to understand basic preparedness and how to be effective after disaster.

NERT teams, and thus the SFFD, will benefit from having increased participation in neighborhoods as they plan for the next disaster, large or small. As more of their neighbors affiliate with NERT, they will know how to be part of the solution should something happen.