

2012

Berkeley CERT Flood Response Operational Exercise



Berkeley CERT

Berkeley Fire Department

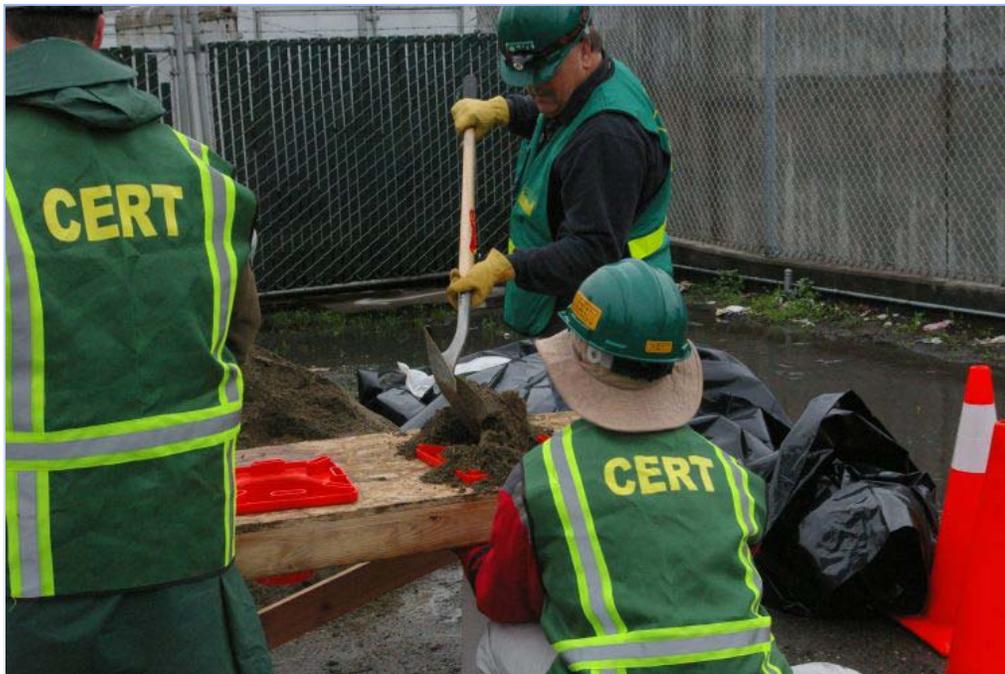
3/16/2012

Executive Summary

This after action report is intended to assist the City of Berkeley's CERT program by identifying strengths, identifying potential areas for further improvement and by recommending follow up actions learned from the March 2012 winter storm response.

Berkeley CERT conducted a sandbagging and flood water mitigation operational exercise on March 15-16, 2012. The operational exercise was conducted in collaboration with the City of Berkeley Public Works Department in support of the city's overall storm response and was the first using response skills and flood water control techniques acquired in Berkeley CERT's Expedient Flood training.

The exercise included activation and call out of Berkeley CERT, the setup of a limited CERT command post, response communications monitoring, sand bag construction in a logistics staging area, and transport, delivery, and deployment of sandbags to divert potential flooding on 2nd Street.



Strengths

Key strengths identified included:

- Activation and call out of trained volunteers was effective through email and telephone communications.
- Recent hazard specific training conducted prior to operational exercise was easily recalled and implemented.
- Safety, teamwork and communication were effectively managed by the Flood Group Supervisor and Safety Officer.

Areas for Improvement

Recommendations for improvement included:

- Maintaining operational readiness for CERT volunteers, response equipment, forms, and personal protective equipment by establishing prescribed activation and deployment criteria and operating procedures for volunteer response teams.
- Recruiting and training a CERT Incident Management Team (IMT) to provide effective and organized overhead support for any CERT mission.
- Instituting demobilization and debriefing standards and operating guidelines for CERT.

Exercise and Response Objectives

1. Implement an effective call out to trained CERT volunteers for flood water mitigation response.
2. Utilize Incident Command System (ICS) to organize a safe and effective response mission.
3. Mobilize and demobilize CERT training and response equipment and command post.
4. Effectively coordinate with City Public Works Department and Fire Department.

Narrative

Six straight days of rain in March 2012 from three consecutive storm weather systems in an otherwise dry winter in Berkeley left many of areas of the city's storm water systems and streets vulnerable to flooding. In support of the City of Berkeley's storm response and to implement an operational exercise, Berkeley CERT was activated to exercise the CERT Expedient Flood training acquired earlier this winter. The City's Public Works Department had determined that sandbags could be deployed to mitigate possible flood issues should the anticipated storm system on Friday March 16 bring Cordones creek above its banks at 2nd Street.

On the morning of March 15, trained CERT responders were alerted and polled for possible response times. At 1030 hours on March 16, a 1415 hours check in time was established at the Harrison and 2nd Street staging area. City Public Works delivered sand, shovels, and sand bagging stations to the staging area by 1300 hours. Following the setup of a limited CERT command post, an operational briefing and the establishment of the CERT Flood Group ICS structure, sand bagging response began at approximately 1440 hours. By 1550 hours, in continuous rain, the CERT Flood Group had constructed, transported, and implemented the 50 sandbag low bank reinforcement assigned to them.



Overview

Activity Name

Berkeley CERT Flood Response Operational Exercise

Duration

2 days

Exercise Dates

March 15, 2012 – Activation and Call Out

March 16, 2012 – CERT Team Deployment and Flood Response

Participating Agencies

Berkeley Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

Berkeley Fire Department

City of Berkeley Public Works Department

Number of Participants

Players 12

Evaluators 1

Controllers 2

Focus

- Response
- Recovery
- Prevention
- Other

Type of Exercise

Full Scale

Evaluation

Exercise evaluation was conducted through player debriefing and hotwash. The exercise was designed to provide participants with an opportunity to assess current capabilities and procedures required to activate CERT trained community members to respond to a flood water scenario in Berkeley.

Participants identified strengths, weaknesses, and future training needs. Observations focus primarily on overall actions, interactions and challenges rather than on individual players.

Event Chronology

Date	Time	Event or Activity Description, Notes, Comments
3/15	1202 hrs	Initial CERT Team Alert sent out via email to 30 flood response trained members. 15 positive responses, 1 negative.
3/15	1950 hrs	Second CERT Team Alert sent out via email to 11 positive repliers for a possible Friday afternoon response time.
3/15	1952 hrs	Notification to NALCO for possible communications support
3/16	1030 hrs	Call out for a 1415 hours deployment to 2 nd and Harrison St for staging and command post.
3/16	1200 hrs	Sand delivered to staging area at CNG filling station on 2 nd St.
3/16	1300 hrs	Sand bagging equipment delivered to staging area.
3/16	1345 hrs	CERT equipment trailer deployed to 2 nd and Harrison St. Command post established at CNG filling station on 2 nd St.
3/16	1400 hrs	NALCO communications liaison arrives and is briefed.
3/16	1415 hrs	CERT members begin arriving at staging/command post for check in and operational briefing.
3/16	1440 hrs	CERT Flood Group established and deployed for sandbag construction, transport and implementation.
3/16	1550 hrs	CERT Flood Group mission complete. Public Works Department review completed. Demobilization of CERT command post completed.
3/16	1555 hrs	CERT responders demobilized and released.



Demonstrated Strengths and Improvement Plan

This operational exercise was Berkeley CERT's first in applying flood response measures. The participants met all response and exercise objectives. Key strengths demonstrated include effective activation and call out via email for a delayed response time, effective timing for flood response training for readiness for winter storms, and team safety and communication effectively managed through ICS.

- Email call out and phone communications were effective in this situation given traditional communications were not compromised. The delayed time frame for response allowed for responders to indicate availability and respond according to finalized call out times.
- The CERT Expedient Flood training conducted in February 2012 complemented the traditional winter storm response times for Berkeley's seasonal climate. This training should be held close to winter storm season each year to take advantage of freshness of relevant training for responders.
- The assigned Safety Officer and Flood Group Supervisors were not specifically position trained in their roles but performed very effectively in their roles by utilizing their knowledge of ICS. The Safety Officer, in particular, was credited with very effectively overseeing the safety and rehab needs of the Flood Group.

Some areas of improvement identified include the need to improve the maintenance of operational readiness for CERT volunteers, response equipment, forms, and personal protective equipment (PPE); to develop a CERT IMT to support effective and accountable response by a deployed CERT team; and to improve demobilization and debriefing standards for each CERT operation.

- One of Berkeley CERT's ongoing objectives is the development and implementation of a volunteer program that goes beyond disaster preparedness. Although CERT teams in Berkeley have developed strong neighborhood-based coordination, coordination at a city-wide level can

be improved through establishing a volunteer program that formalizes call out, deployment, and operational procedures for CERT volunteers. Observations from the Flood Response Operational Exercise indicate that, in order to conduct successful, organized and fully-accountable response missions, formalized response team activation criteria and team operating procedures should be developed and exercised.

- A trained CERT IMT would help ensure proper command post operations including responder check in, documentation, logistics, and demobilization. Ensuring safety and accountability of responders is a primary mission to any CERT deployment and a CERT IMT utilizing ICS can help address this.
- Mobilization of response equipment and PPE should be improved. The need to transfer equipment from one storage location to another prior to deployment slowed mobilization times. Maintaining stashes of ready to mobilize equipment is key to improving flexibility and timeliness in deployment.
- Finally, demobilization and debriefing was abbreviated that day due to inclement weather and the desire to allow responders to get out of the weather. However, a more comprehensive debriefing should be conducted in order to further ensure responder safety, verify mission completeness, and to facilitate improvement and critique. Standard demobilization and expectations on demobilization and debriefing will need to be further developed for future activations.

Conclusion

The Berkeley CERT Flood Response Operational Exercise demonstrated the ability of trained community responders to collaborate with and implement an organized emergency response to the threat of flooding in Berkeley. Detailed activation and deactivation procedures and protocols should be established to more effectively and appropriately coordinate this community resource. Training and coordination of a CERT Incident Management Team to oversee command post operations and ICS structure for CERT response should be implemented to improve response effectiveness and responder accountability.

CERT training and continuing education provided volunteer responders with the knowledge and skills to be effective. Exercising of skills through planned simulation scenarios and through real-life application of skills, CERT members become more effective and safe as responders when needed in the community.