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CERT Program Launched in Statesville, North Carolina

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Approaching a badly damaged home, CERT members shout through a doorway in an attempt to determine if anyone might be trapped inside. A citizen is found lying outside the building and a member breaks off from the group to begin assessing injuries. Meanwhile, a fire erupts and a team member moves quickly to extinguish it with a small fire extinguisher.

All in a day's work? It was for this group. These were just a few of the challenges facing members of Iredell County's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) on a bright, spring morning. The group of volunteers, representing the first class of its kind in Iredell County, was participating in a disaster exercise designed to test all they had learned in a 7-week disaster preparedness program.

The training, offered free of charge, offers citizens the opportunity to learn the basic skills and knowledge necessary to protect themselves and others during a disaster. Participants are instructed on such topics as disaster preparedness, medical care, and fire safety. Recognized as a "valuable tool for community involvement" by one team member, the program also offers insight into the disaster roles of community first responders and a greater understanding of federal and local government disaster planning efforts.



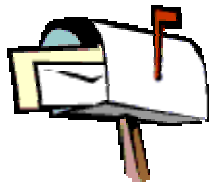
"We're very excited to offer this program to the citizens of Iredell County," says Tracy Jackson, Director of

Emergency Services, "An effective disaster preparedness program must reach out to and educate all citizens and organizations within the community. The CERT program is a great means to do just that." Jackson anticipates the training program will grow rapidly and contribute significantly to the county's level of disaster preparedness as the Office of Emergency Management and local emergency planning groups work diligently to promote awareness and recruiting efforts.

Iredell County hopes to meet demand for classes by offering two training programs annually. Course graduates will continue their involvement through additional training programs and other community activities.

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