

City of Sammamish

CERT Communications Plan

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to describe the plan for CERT communications in the event of a disaster or other emergency that requires the activation of CERT teams.

Summary

In a disaster or other emergency, communications between neighborhoods and the Emergency Operations Center are required for several purposes, including casualty reports, damage assessment reports, logistics requests and “health and welfare” traffic. In addition, reliable communications between and among CERT teams will enhance their ability to complete their missions.

In a disaster or other emergency, normal means of communications, including landline and cellular phones, will not be disrupted or unavailable. Therefore, it is important to have alternate communications capability in place and available.

This document details the procedures by which CERT teams can communicate with each other and the EOC in the event of an emergency.

CERT Organization

CERT teams in Sammamish are currently organized by neighborhood, following the boundaries of existing developments where possible. Within any given neighborhood, there may be no CERT teams, or one or more CERT team.

Groups of CERT teams (neighborhoods) are assigned “Home” Fire Stations, based on the Eastside Fire and Rescue “First-In” response plan.

Communications Roles

Effective communications requires that certain roles be assigned to one or more CERT Team members. The most important of these roles is that of ‘communicator’. In addition, each CERT team member in possession of a radio (either FRS/GMRS or Amateur) may also be called upon to communicate using his/her radio.

Communicator Role

The role of the communicator on a CERT team is to be that team's focal point for communications. If a radio amateur is available, he or she is the logical choice to assume this role.

Team Member Role

All CERT team members other than the communicator should be prepared to assume at least some role in communications.

Communications Modes

During CERT activation, CERT teams will use the following modes of communication:

1. FRS Radios
2. GMRS Radios
3. Amateur Radios

Note that both the GMR and Amateur Radio Services are "licensed" services, that is, an FCC license is required. At the present time, it is the responsibility of the individual operators to obtain the required licenses.

FRS Radios

FRS radios are the primary tool used by CERT teams to communicate among themselves (intra-team communications), and to communicate with nearby CERT teams (inter-team communications). Each CERT team will be assigned a unique frequency/tone to be used for intra-team communications. The frequencies/tones to be used are defined in Appendix A.

GMRS Radios

GMRS radios are much like FRS radios; however, due to their higher power output, their use by CERT teams should be limited to cases in which FRS radios are not effective. GMRS radios will be used by Fire Station Teams in order to communicate over longer distances in cases where Amateur Radio is not available. Each Fire Station will be assigned a frequency/tone that will be used as it's CERT communications channel.¹

Amateur Radios

Amateur radios, operated by licensed amateurs, will be used to communicate between neighborhoods, Fire Stations and the EOC. The frequencies to be used are listed in Appendix B.

Activation Plan

In the event of an emergency, CERT communications will be activated as outlined in this section.

¹ The Fire Station Channels will typically be selected from the shared GMRS/FRS frequencies, in order to enable longer range communications from the Fire Station.

Team Communications

As a CERT team is formed, a team leader will be selected. The team leader should then select an individual to fill the role of communicator. In some cases, team leader may decide to take on this role. If an Amateur Radio operator is present, he or she should be considered for this role.

The team communicator should assess the number of radios available and the capabilities of each radio. If more than 1 FRS/GMRS radio is available, they should be distributed among the team members. Each radio should be set to the appropriate neighborhood/area frequency/tone (see Appendix A) and tested.

The communicator should attempt to establish communications with their “Home” Fire Station and/or the EOC, using FRS/GMRS or Amateur radio, on the appropriate channel/frequency (which will be different from the neighborhood frequency). The initial communication should be in the form a quick “check-in” and should identify the neighborhood, the team lead, the number of members and the status of the team. For example:

“Station 82 - This is the Demery Hill CERT team checking in with 5 people, our team lead is Victoria Findley, we are commencing a check of our neighborhood”.

Amateur Radio operators should follow the SARGe Communications plan, and comply with all applicable FCC rules and regulations.

Be aware that the Fire Stations and EOC will be extremely busy and may not immediately respond. If your transmission is not acknowledged, wait 15 minutes and attempt again – try every 15 minutes until you establish communications. In the meantime, use FRS to communicate between team members as required.