

Improving Emergency Response at Airports

Few cities in the United States deal with the ever-present threat of disasters on the scale of Los Angeles, California. In 1985, the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) identified the need for a community-driven response to aid emergency service personnel in disaster situations. After studying examples of disaster preparedness and response in Japan and Mexico City, LAFD developed a pilot program in 1986 to train the first group of civilian volunteers on basic fire suppression, light search and rescue, and first aid.

In October 1987, the Whittier Narrows earthquake in southern California dramatically underscored the need to expedite training of volunteers, prompting the City of Los Angeles to begin developing a network of Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT). In 1993, the CERT program was adopted on a national level by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) under its Citizen Corps program. Since late 2011, communities in all 50 U.S. states and three territories have conducted CERT training.

ACRP Report 95: Integrating Community Emergency Response Teams (A-CERTs) at Airports, describes the process of integrating CERTs to specifically meet the needs of airports. These teams may be composed of airport employees typically unaffiliated with emergency response, existing outside CERT teams, or some combination of the two. Although these teams are trained to fill a critical need during disaster response, the teams may also be used for a host of other purposes, including traffic control support, staffing informational centers during holidays, and assist airport law enforcement and

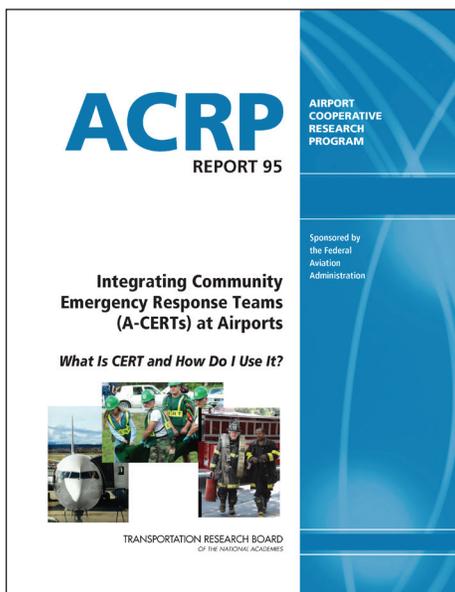
security personnel by serving as escorts for construction projects. Volunteers for an Airport Community Response Team, or A-CERTs, receive supplemental training specific to the local airport and may also undergo background checks.

Robert Sims, on staff at Grand Forks International Airport (GFK) in North Dakota, was tasked in 2014 to integrate CERT into the airport's emergency management plan. Sims relied on guidance in *ACRP Report 95* to accomplish this task. When Sims first made contact with local CERTs, he unexpectedly found that many of the teams were no longer active. *ACRP Report 95* recommends regular training as one safeguard against letting a CERT program becoming inactive.

Basic training for the A-CERT at GFK started in October 2014. Sims, and co-facilitator Gunnar Larson, hold a mandatory training every quarter with an emphasis on decision making in a disaster scenario. A-CERT training at GFK emphasizes familiarizing volunteers with the layout of the airport, such as identifying where hazards are located and which buildings contain the most personnel.

The program at GFK is now composed of about eight core volunteers and eight more who come for periodic trainings. All of the volunteers come from outside of the airport. Volunteers at the GFK A-CERT have not received additional security clearance, though it may be part of the program in the future in order to move the program forward.

Sims found *ACRP Report 95*, together with less airport-specific guidance from FEMA on CERT, to be an important asset while establishing an A-CERT program. "*ACRP Report 95* was one of the main



Right: Rodney Carstens, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, instructing A-CERT volunteers at Grand Forks International Airport. Image courtesy of GFK.

Improving Emergency Response at Airports—continued

Since 2006, an industry-driven, applied research program that develops near-term, practical solutions to problems faced by airport operators.



Above: Grand Forks International Airport holds mandatory A-CERT training every quarter. The A-CERT team includes about eight core and eight additional volunteers. All volunteers come from outside of the airport. Image courtesy of GFK.

resources we used to see what a successful A-CERT program looked like and how to implement it,” said Sims. “It synthesized a lot of information that gave us direction and helped orient us. Once we had the clear vision of how an A-CERT should operate, it became much easier to move forward.”

ACRP Report 95 provides guidance to A-CERT program coordinators looking to facilitate the development of a healthy, growing program. The report guides facilitators to identify core personnel, including administrative assistance, instructors, and volunteers who take charge of part of the program. These people, as well as future A-CERT volunteers, will take charge of key program responsibilities. The report includes suggestions for securing grant money from FEMA and for identifying other sources, such as establishing a non-profit organization or requesting a line-item in the airport’s budget. The report also directs the program coordinator to additional guidance on the FEMA website on CERT training.

Appendices in the report contain documents with examples of fliers used to market A-CERTs, checklists for program facilitators to use, sign-in sheets, evaluation forms, participant feedback forms, and periodic evaluation forms. All of these documents can be modified for use at interested airports, reducing the time burden on the program facilitator which helps to ensure that the program remains active. The appendices also include a sample A-CERT

full scale exercise, with notes on important considerations for organizing the event, staff roles in the exercise, schedule, and list of materials.

Reaching beyond the airport property into the larger community, *ACRP Report 95* also highlights several examples of CERT members providing community service outside of disaster situations. CERT volunteers have staffed first aid booths, spoken at PTA meetings, handled donations during disaster situations, and even supplemented fire staff during fire season. The guidance provided by *ACRP Report 95* provides basic guidance to enable airports to make use of A-CERT programs as an invaluable community resource.

During airport training, A-CERTs learn to:

- Prepare for specific known hazards that threaten the airport;
- Apply size-up and safety principles;
- Assist trades personnel in terminating utilities;
- Extinguish small fires;
- Set up a medical treatment area;
- Conduct searches and rescues in lightly and moderately damaged structures;
- Understand the psychological impact of a disaster on themselves and others;
- Organize CERT members and spontaneous volunteers for an effective and safe response;
- Assist in pedestrian and vehicle traffic control; and
- Apply response skills in a disaster simulation.

*ACRP Report 95:
Integrating Community Emergency
Response Teams (A-CERTs) at Airports*

Left: Cover page of a promotional flyer produced by Grand Forks International Airport to help recruit volunteers for A-CERT training. Image courtesy of GFK.

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