

# Is a Program like CERT, Search & Rescue, or the American Red Cross Right for You?

- *Volunteering as an emergency responder can ensure you are among the first to know of impending or unfolding disasters.*
- *The more prepared the average citizen is, the easier it is to overcome a disaster incident.*
- *Trained volunteers are issued uniforms and IDs to get them past incident perimeters.*
- *Unless you are trained and have ID before disaster strikes, responding agencies may consider you a "spontaneous volunteer." Unless they have the resources to train and manage you, they may turn you away or even bar you from your own neighborhood.*

Some survivalists are so overwhelmed by their exposure to known and unknown threats, the urgency of preparing for them, and endless lists of lists of skills and stuff they are taught that they must stockpile to be prepared, that volunteering seems like a waste of limited time, financial and material resources. In short, "There is only so much pie, and the larger the slice is that I give away, the less is left for me and mine!" They operate from a paradigm one of my most influential mentors called the "scarcity mentality." The competing paradigm is called the "abundance mentality" and it says, "Let's make more pie so there's plenty for everyone!"

## Even SWAT Teams Are Helpless Against This

**WATCH VIDEO**



While both paradigms play important roles in survival decision making, the scarcity mentality receives so much emphasis and the abundance mentality receives so little that one might conclude that the latter has no place in survival. Fortunately, that's not true. Sometimes survivors not only survive survival ordeals but become stronger, smarter, more adaptable or benefit in some other way from the experience. They do more than just survive.

## The Words Survivalists Dread

**"I'm from the government and I'm here to help you!"** When you are the first person to show up in a uniform, there are two responses: the more common is that you are now in charge and everyone now expects you to take over and tell them what to do. The other is, "Go away! We're doing fine on our own."

Personally, I'd rather hear the latter, because the more prepared and self-reliant the average citizen is, the less needs to be done to get things back to normal. In neighborhoods where nobody is prepared, and everybody thinks it's the government's responsibility to feed and care for them (and their pets and property), defend them and make sure there is never any suffering in the world, the task of the emergency responder becomes insurmountable.

## FEMA

When the topic of volunteering with FEMA comes up, someone invariably comments, "Volunteer with FEMA?! Are you nuts?!"



Believe me, I understand what alphabet soup agencies like FEMA represent to the survival community. I l was part of this community in the '90s when a smear campaign orchestrated by the regime occupying the White House back then turned the word “survivalist” into a pejorative, driving most of us underground and eventually forcing us to rebrand ourselves as preppers. For about a decade, nobody wanted to be called a survivalist until survival reality TV and renewed interest in bushcraft made it acceptable to be a survivalist again.

I have also volunteered with FEMA programs for going on ten years now, and while I don't agree with some of FEMA's policies or the bureaucracy and red tape, there are some sound reasons to volunteer with [Citizen Corps](#) programs that are administrated by FEMA.

## Volunteer Opportunities for Preppers

There are a lot of volunteer programs out there, but here are a few that can be of benefit to survivalists:

- [Community Emergency Response Team Program \(CERT\)](#) – I have extensive experience with this program and can attest that CERT offers tremendous benefits for survivalists in some areas and just about anyone can find a way to learn and contribute through this program.

I have received a lot of great training through CERT that I couldn't have otherwise afforded and have received some real-world experience in the form of a half dozen deployments to emergencies, mostly flood-related. The training and deployments have improved the effectiveness of my emergency preparedness efforts. Whether or not you decide to volunteer you may take advantage of free training at <https://www.ready.gov/training>.

- Neighborhood Watch Programs – Neighborhood watch is a good way to get to know your neighbors and neighborhood, have positive interactions with law enforcement and gives you the pretext to be vigilant and patrol your neighborhood.
- Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) – If you are trained as a healthcare professional and would not have other responsibilities during an emergency, then the MRC may be a good way to keep some of your certifications current and volunteer.
- Search & Rescue (SAR) – Search and Rescue has a lot to offer survivalists. The training and physical requirements are exhausting, and equipment costs are high with some units, but the tracking and first aid training are first-rate and SAR has plenty of crossover for survivalists. There are also many specialized units such as canine and mounted SAR. At least out West, SAR units are often affiliated with the county level of government.
- American Red Cross (ARC) – While I do not volunteer directly with the ARC, I have participated in joint exercises with them and volunteered to play the part of a victim and stay overnight in an ARC shelter as part of a training exercise. I have heard quite a bit of speculation about ARC shelters from survivalists, none of whom had ever set foot in one, and can tell you that while they may not serve meals on time and they check people in and out, they are a private organization, not

the federal government and folks survivors would be dealing with in my area would be locals. The ARC organizes blood drives, teaches first aid and CPR classes (certification classes are not free in my area), and run shelters.

- Boy Scouts of America or Girl Scouts – I have experience with the BSA both as a scout and as a leader. As a youth, the BSA gave me my first truly formal marksmanship training and introduced me to the world of competitive shooting. It also turned me into to a competent backpacker and helped me to learn important outdoor skills as I worked my way to Eagle Scout. As an adult, I participated as a leader in the USA and abroad and continued to improve my pioneering skills by presenting me with the opportunity to help build a primitive scout camp from scratch overseas that was only reachable by boat. Unfortunately, the BSA used to offer much better training before the organization bought into the impossible “leave no trace” propaganda that boils down to an “ethic” falsely-so-called. Life is an act of consumption and if you think that putting our own natural resources in glass cases while trashing the rest of the world (where there is less environmental oversight) makes you a good steward of the planet, you’re mistaken. Separating man and nature only increases people’s ignorance of it and worsens the damage they do. Despite the state of disrepair of scouting in the USA, the scouting programs still teach important skills that every young adult should know so I still support them.
- Religious Groups – Some churches have trained volunteer teams to muck out houses after floods, respond to emergencies, and distribute supplies.
- [Louisiana Cajun Navy](#) – The Cajun Navy is experiencing some growing pains. On one hand, they want to cooperate with first responders and come when requested. On the other, they don’t want to have to be trained, licensed

or assume any liability for helping others. Since it's a private organization without accredited training, you could drive several states away to help and have your help refused as "spontaneous volunteers." If you can handle that and have a boat and the desire to help, they may be an option for you.

The benefit of any of these programs can vary greatly from program to program. The more rural an area you are in the more local government depends on first responders. In some small rural towns, all first responders except law enforcement are volunteers including ambulance drivers, EMT's and firemen. If you volunteer in a small town where nearly all the emergency responders are volunteer, you may receive top-notch training side by side with paid first responders, get a lot of valuable experience responding to real-life emergencies and create relationships of trust with emergency managers in the city, county and sometimes even state levels. In these cases, the **benefits to survivalists** are numerous:

- **You may be one of the first few people notified** in the event of an impending or unfolding disaster. This could easily save lives in your household and give you the information you need to decide whether to shelter in place or bugout in response to a given incident.
- Depending on the program, you may be issued a uniform and ID to get you past disaster checkpoints. When an incident occurs, the government attempts to establish a perimeter and control who leaves and enters the disaster area and residents are often barred from their own homes and neighborhoods.
- You may gain access to emergency plans for your area. In any case, you will learn about the Incident Command System which is a set of SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) created after 9-11 to get all first responders are on the same page.
- You may receive or purchase training and personal

protective equipment (PPE) that will help you to respond effectively and avoid becoming another casualty. More people are often injured in the wake of disasters than in the events themselves.

- Avoid becoming a “spontaneous volunteer” if you try to help. Many good people attempt to volunteer only to find that to the government they are spontaneous volunteers. In the government’s eyes, they are unknowns that may make the situation worse rather than helping. The practice of turning disaster scenes into turf battles between government agencies competing for funding and the policy of attempting to regulate people helping other people during emergencies has created untold public ill will toward FEMA and is more than many freedom-loving survivalists can bear. Survivalists who understand how the government operates can hurdle this obstacle by becoming trained volunteers before an emergency rather than showing up and trying to help on their own after an incident is in progress. The core problem with FEMA’s approach is that disasters and volatility are hard to predict. If we could predict disasters, they wouldn’t be emergencies because we could prevent them or at least plan and prepare for them.
- Volunteering puts preppers in contact with others of like mind, which sometimes helps them network with other survivalists.
- In serving others in their time of greatest need, we live the golden rule. Love is a verb and something we do. It should not be downgraded to an emotion we merely experience. Service also takes our minds off our own needs and can put our own problems into perspective. Sacrificing time and energy in the service of others goes beyond being ‘mindful’ of their needs.

In more urban areas, volunteer experience varies with the frequency of past disasters that overwhelmed paid first responders, how recently the last one occurred, and the

expectation of future disasters. In isolated smaller cities that have paid first responders, the capacity of paid first responders can be as low as a few simultaneous calls. In these cities, the likelihood of exceeding the capacity of paid responders is high and volunteers are likely to be activated periodically.

## **Wouldn't volunteering endanger my family?**

During large scope disasters like Hurricane Katrina, we learned for a fact what survivalists had predicted for decades: most emergency responders will only respond after they and their household are squared away. Since Katrina, the government has come to terms with the fact that until responders know their families are taken care of, they won't be of much use even if they do show up. Now, the government recognizes that the first duty of any responder is to their family. If my family needs me, I won't be able to volunteer because I'll be taking care of my family first.

Low muster rates inside affected areas mean that most volunteers must come from outside the area affected by an incident. This means that volunteers must be able to deploy outside their immediate areas and be largely self-sustaining while they do so. Because whoever responds to serve and protect others needs to know that someone is taking care of their families, an incident that affected entire states or the entire country could require international aid, so keep in mind that the better prepared the average citizen is, the easier and more plausible recovery becomes.





**CLICK HERE**

to find out more on the first aid techniques that will save your life when the health system is down!