

Lesson Overview

In a disaster, victims may need life-saving or life-sustaining help. As a CERT member, you may become a first responder because professional help is not immediately available.

Key Points:

In a disaster setting, CERT members may assist in providing immediate care for life-threatening injuries by:

- Performing triage and rapid treatment for victims.
 - Establishing medical treatment areas.
 - Performing head-to-toe assessment and treatment.
 - Managing disaster-related stress for themselves and victims.
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Time Is Critical

When a disaster occurs—whether an earthquake, a flood, or a smaller event—trauma-related injuries often result.

The injuries can run the gamut from nonserious to life-threatening to fatal. For some, early intervention will make the crucial difference between life and death.

You Can Help

Following a disaster, neighborhood and workplace teams can respond more quickly to critical needs in their areas than professional responders. When professional responders do arrive, CERT members take direction from them and may be asked to assist them.

Your Goal

As a CERT member, your goal is to act safely to do the greatest good for the greatest number of victims. To do this, you need to be able to:

- Size up the situation to determine if it is safe to act.
- Triage victims quickly, identifying those with the most serious injuries.
- Treating those with life-threatening injuries first.

Understanding the potential for death due to injuries will help you prioritize victims' needs and your efforts.

Death From Trauma

Disaster trauma victims who die from their injuries can be divided into three categories:

1. Those who will die within **minutes** as a result of overwhelming and irreversible damage to vital organs.
2. Those who will die within **several hours** due to excessive bleeding.
3. Those who will die within **several days or weeks** from infection or multiple-organ failure (i.e., complications of the injury).

Understanding these phases can help you apply your training to do the greatest good for the greatest number of victims.

Preventing Death From Disaster Trauma

Research has shown that more than 40 percent of disaster victims in phases 2 and 3 could be saved by providing simple medical care.

Disaster Psychology

Disasters can have a psychological impact on CERT members and disaster victims.

There are steps that you can take to reduce your personal stress level and to help survivors handle traumatic stress.

Protecting Yourself

As a CERT member, protecting yourself must always be your first priority. Below are some important ways to protect yourself.

First, always wear your safety equipment, including:

- Work gloves.
- Goggles.
- Dust mask.
- Helmet.
- Boots.

The best type of mask is one labeled "N95," which will filter particles as small as 3 microns.

Latex Gloves for Protection

Second, when working with a victim:

- Wear latex gloves, goggles, and mask to protect against exposure to body fluids and blood-borne pathogens such as hepatitis and HIV.
- Be sure to change or sterilize gloves between victims. You'll learn more about changing and sterilizing gloves in the next lesson.

To save time, you can wear latex gloves under work gloves. Then, when you find a victim, you can just remove the work gloves and be ready to go.

Distance for Protection

Third, know when to stay away.

If there is evidence of chemical materials, do not approach! (For example, multiple victims gasping for air without an obvious reason could indicate chemical agents.) These situations are "stop signs" for CERTs. Leave the scene to avoid endangering yourself or spreading contamination.

Trained professionals with specialized equipment are needed to respond to these situations.

Lesson Summary

- As a CERT member, your goal is to stay safe and to do the greatest good for the greatest number of victims.
- Some disaster victims who would otherwise die from trauma-related injuries can be saved by early treatment. While waiting for professional responders, trained CERT members can provide that crucial early treatment.
- Don't try to apply the medical treatment skills covered in this course until you have completed the classroom training.