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## CERT seeks donations to assist in emergencies

By **BRIAN PORTER** Managing Editor

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When there's trouble and the first responders need relief or assistance during a large-scale incident in Rowlett and Sachse, the fire and police departments have an ally.

The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and CERT-Relief, nearly 130 residents strong, have a team ready for a call around the clock 365 days a year.

If you've seen a major emergency in Rowlett or Sachse and you've observed an RV on the scene, you've seen CERT in action.

"We call it Rehab One," said Whitney Laning, president of the Rowlett Citizen Corps Council. "We take it out anytime there is a major fire or police incident in the city. We've been pretty busy this summer with an unusually high call load because of the heat we've had."

As such, supplies are dwindling.

In each emergency response, CERT and CERT-Relief arrive on the scene of an incident with bottled water, sports drinks and snacks such as peanut butter crackers and granola bars.

"Our supplies are running low because of the extreme hot, dry weather conditions we've been experiencing this year, and a significant increase in call out activations," said Robin Simoneaux, CERT-Relief assistant director. "On an average incident, we can go through two to four cases of bottled water, Propel or Gatorade. But, on really hot days or large incidents, we've used as much as 10 cases at a time."

Laning explains that fire engines are equipped with certain supplies, like drinking water.

On brief calls under an hour, the supplies on the fire engines are plentiful enough. A large-scale incident requires more supplies and the assistance of CERT and CERT-Relief.

"If needed, we can provide services like bringing dinner," Laning said. "We can also do things like help them roll up water hoses."

The CERT program began in 2002 as Citizens Assisting Public Safety (CAPS) to provide rehabilitation and other support services to Rowlett and Sachse fire and police personnel working emergency incidents.

The organization operates a converted RV which is frequently used as a canteen or operations center. This year teams have responded to thirteen requests for assistance.

"That may not sound like a lot, but compared to only eight in all of last year, it nearly doubles our call volume," Simoneaux said.

Those citizens volunteering for CERT and CERT-Relief could be about anyone in any occupation.

"We have off-duty police officers, entrepreneurs. We do encompass about every occupation out there," Laning said. "We don't have a golf pro, but I'm sure we have a lot who would like to be."

CERT-Relief accepts the smaller-scale calls and CERT responds to larger-scale calls and disaster responses, like the flooding response last year.

"We have a pool of drivers on call three weeks at a time and when the call comes in they make their way to

where the unit is parked at that time," Laning said. "We have six rotating teams on duty for one week at a time and daytime team so we can respond 24 hours a day."

More than 200 people have been trained and about 130 have been retained. Laning explains that the ones which have not been retained have moved from Rowlett or were not Rowlett residents, like members of the National Guard trained by CERT.

The response procedure begins with a page to the team leader and then a page from that person to all other members of the team.

"We can typically all get to a meeting place in 15 minutes," Laning said. "We'll begin preparing supplies and can usually make it to an incident in a half-hour or 45 minutes."

The RV is not allowed to run code, as fire and police vehicles can, and as such can be slowed by peak traffic delays. Most of the calls, though, come at non-peak traffic times, Laning explains.

With each response supplies are used and depleted, much like a food shelter with only the stock available which funding has provided.

"We are fully-funded by public donations. All materials and supplies n even down to the RV n have all been purchased with donations and contributions. We don't get federal or state funding," Laning said. "When supplies run low, it does require that we solicit donations to rebuild or supplies for response."

That is the point CERT and CERT-Relief are experiencing now. They need supplies to offer public safety personnel a drink of water while serving other roles like setting up misting fans to cool off, helping to roll up hoses, directing traffic or any number of other support duties on an emergency incident.

For more information about donating to CERT-Relief or volunteering with the Rowlett Citizen Corps Council through one of their disaster preparedness and public safety programs, call 972-463-3906 or visit [rowlettcitizencorps.org](http://rowlettcitizencorps.org). All donations are tax deductible.

"It really is a great program," Laning said. "We have a fantastic working relationship with the city. This definitely benefits the citizens of Rowlett by helping to stretch tax dollars."

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