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## **News Release**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Ho-Ho-Kus CERT Personnel Participate in County-wide**

### **Shelter Operations Exercise**

**(By Stanley A. Kober, Ho-Ho-Kus CERT Program Manager)**

The inclement weather on Saturday, September 12, 2009 was exactly what is considered a good backdrop for a Shelter Operations Exercise in September, National Disaster Preparedness Month.

Ho-Ho-Kus CERT personnel were among the hundreds of Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) volunteers in Bergen County, who descended on the Northern Valley Regional High School in Demarest, NJ for an indoor exercise on how to setup and operate a shelter for persons and one for their pets, and to manage the various requirements for registration, accountability, feeding, first aid, housing the shelter residents, etc. in accordance with American Red Cross guidelines. This exercise, the first of its kind conducted for CERT volunteers by the Bergen County Office of Emergency Management is part of a state-wide set of exercises being conducted in New

Jersey during September. The planning team for the County exercise consisted of personnel directed by Bergen County Police Det. Gidget Petry, (County CERT Coordinator) Bergen County Office of Emergency Management (BCOEM), under the supervision of LT. Dwayne Razzetti and SGT. Barry Leventhal (BCOEM). Det. Petry was assisted by CERT Coordinators Allan Becker from Mahwah and Ira Marks from Fairlawn with key personnel from the Demarest Police Department and Emergency Services; American Red Cross; The Salvation Army; Bergen County Animal Control; and the Bergen County Medical Reserve Corps.

In addition to the above groups which provided support for the exercise with their personnel and equipment, young people from two Boy Scout and Cub Scout troops acted as victims. The aim of the planning group was to provide an exercise so that the CERT volunteers throughout Bergen County would have the opportunity for hands-on practice (before a real incident) in the areas of: Shelter Registration and Security; Shelter Operations; First Aid Training and Simple Triage; Animal Sheltering; and Feeding of Shelter Residents. From all indications and comments by attendees, that overall goal was met with flying colors.

As for the actual exercise, the CERT personnel were registered when they entered the building and were provided a bar coded wristband for accountability purposes throughout the exercise. Each person was assigned to one of four groups which were scheduled to run in a rotational sequence throughout the day for each of the areas of instruction. At the initial briefing of all the attendees, the CERT personnel were welcomed by Howard Butt, New Jersey Citizen Corps State Coordinator, NJ OEM and former NJSP Captain (ret.) ; Demarest Police Chief J. Powderly; LT. Razzetti and Det. Petry from BCOEM; and Allan Becker, the Mahwah CERT Coordinator. After the briefing, the CERT members began their rotation for the hands-on training. At the Feeding Station, the CERT personnel assisted the Salvation Army in feeding lunch for all the attendees as one of the "hands-on" training components of the exercise, just as if it were a real situation (the food was quite good, too...in my opinion!). At the close of the

exercise, the CERT personnel were debriefed and for their dedicated, voluntary attendance at the exercise, were given an emergency flashlight, supplied by Howard Butt, New Jersey Citizen Corps State Coordinator, NJ OEM.

The CERT Program was started in 1985 in Los Angeles, California as a result of the overwhelming fires and earthquakes in that area and has been made a part of the national volunteer program under the Citizen Corps umbrella of the Department of Homeland Security. The devastating tragedy of 9-11-01 provided further impetus for volunteerism in America and the national CERT program has been expanded so that it "...educates people about disaster preparedness for hazards that may impact their area and trains them in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. Using the training learned in the classroom and during exercises, CERT members can assist others in their neighborhood or workplace following an event when professional responders are not immediately available to help". (See the above quote among other important CERT information at the Citizen Corps' CERT website at <https://www.citizencorps.gov/cert/>.)

In remarks to the CERT members during his Welcome address at the exercise, Howard Butt said that "New Jersey has one of the largest Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) programs in the nation, with 430 registered teams and over 14,000 volunteers trained, organized, and equipped to assist their communities in an emergency. Over 2,000 are in Bergen County alone, which is the largest number for any County in the State of NJ."

There is no cost for any of the training and equipment provided through the County and State for the basic training of the team members. The next basic CERT course from the County, at no-cost-to-attendees, will be at the Bergen County Law and Public Safety Institute (BCLPSI) starting on Wednesday, **October 7, 2009** and will run for eight sessions. Anyone from Ho-Ho-Kus who wants to join the Ho-Ho-Kus CERT team established in January 2005 needs to attend this upcoming course and should immediately contact Stanley A. Kober,

Ho-Ho-Kus CERT Program Coordinator, ([sakober@yahoo.com](mailto:sakober@yahoo.com) or 201-445-1121) or stop by the Ho-Ho-Kus Police Department for a CERT information card.

**“TEEN CERT”**: Finally, the long-desired **“TEEN CERT”** program has been initiated in New Jersey! Any young person between the ages of 13 and 17 may now attend, with their parent/guardians’ written permission, the same basic course of instruction as those 18 and over have been attending, and will receive the same instruction as they do. Any young people ages 13-17 in Ho-Ho-Kus, who want to attend the upcoming course at BCLPSI starting October 7, 2009, and join the Ho-Ho-Kus CERT, with their parent/guardians’ written permission, should immediately contact Stanley A. Kober at 201-445-1121 for the application and paperwork.

All personnel from towns other than Ho-Ho-Kus, who want information about CERT or the upcoming class(es), should contact their local CERT Coordinator or Police Department; or, Det. Gidget Petry (Bergen County CERT Coordinator, BCOEM) at 201-634-3100 for information.

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