



volunteer population we could utilize to our advantage within the neighborhoods.”

During the winter storms of 2016-2017 which left thousands without power for extended periods of time, CERT volunteers — or CERTs — helped the community by recharging batteries in medical equipment for civilians without power.

“Those little incidents that we see help us test our abilities,” Winningham says.

DAY ONE: PANIC

CERT training takes about a month — I took two classes a week, each lasting three hours. When I entered the classroom, I found about 50 fellow community members of all ages.

The population of the CERT class skewed a bit older — middle-aged, probably with families — but my classmates appeared to be from ages 12 to 80. One young mother even brought her toddler along (the kid was adorable in a hard hat).

We split into groups and started getting to know each other while working through tabletop exercises and emergency simulations.

One young man in my group who works for the city wanted to add CERT to his résumé. Another was a retired nurse, and another a mother and therapist. Everyone had different skills to bring to the table.

The first day of CERT training focuses on what threats our community is likely to face, and the kind of supplies and plans we should make sure to have prepared. There is, of course, the deadly Cascadia subduction zone earthquake, but our community is also likely to face flooding, fires, landslides and yet more of those dangerous winter storms that can leave us isolated and without power.

By the end of class, I was sweating bullets. The trainers — including Brandon Noble, an experienced CERT, Dr. Geoff Simmons of the Red Cross, and emergency planners like Winningham — said in the event of the big quake we were likely to face weeks without outside help, months without power and up to two years without fully functioning medical facilities.

That realization came as a slap in the face: There’s a 37-percent chance of a major Cascadia earthquake in the next 50 years, and it could very well kill thousands. We’re likely to have refugees from the coast after the quake, Winningham says.

“We are almost the second-largest city in the state,” she says. “And then you tie in all the other little rural communities and cities we have around, people are coming here to look for those resources.”

I realized I was totally unprepared. I would run out of water in a day.

I went to the store and soon had 35 gallons of water stockpiled — enough to last my household of two humans and a dog for a week. I live close to the river, so I also bought a water filter that can pump up clean water from unclean sources.

Stage three in accepting the possibility of disaster (much like grief’s bargaining stage) can get a bit expensive. This stage is personal preparation and self-preservation — marked by a shaky determination to save your own skin. I started hoarding cans of food and worked on growing my medical supply kit.

I found large storage containers at Costco in which to stockpile everything I could need — bleach to purify water (just a few drops and a half-hour wait makes it safe), hand sanitizer and sanitation wipes, shelf-stable foods, lighters.

As I became embroiled in worry over the coming Cascadia apocalypse, I started assessing threats in my own neighborhood. With only one door to leave my apartment, it became difficult to find alternative routes out. But with power lines strung up very close to my front door, I decided a window is a safer exit.

“Okay, so we’ll drop our stepladder out the window and one of us will jump out and set it up,” I planned with my partner, who also attended the class. “Then the other person hands the dog out the window and we both clamber out. Afterwards we can assess the house and turn off the gas line.”

I brought my camping gear indoors from our outdoor storage room located under the power lines. Having a tent and sleeping bags available post-earthquake is a must — our typical shelters could be too dangerous to stay in.

SAFETY LESSONS

One CERT lesson led by Noble focused on how to determine the safety of a structure. CERTs are expected to identify — and stay out of — buildings that are threatening collapse, even if we hear citizens screaming for help inside.

Noble says an injured CERT goes from an asset to a patient, so personal safety is of the utmost importance.

I started feeling more confident in my ability to protect myself, and started worrying about my neighborhood. This outward concern is stage four in the earthquake acceptance process: Now that I’m ready, how can I get ready to help other people?

We learned about search-and-rescue tactics. Eugene Deputy Fire Chief Ray Brown has 222 firefighters in Eugene, and he expects most to respond to a nearby station in the case of an earthquake. That still means only one firefighter per 750 civilians in Eugene — they’ll probably be too busy to rescue my neighbors or me after a quake.

So I learned how to work with a team to rescue a victim trapped under concrete using a lever and blocks of wood. (This was followed by a trip to Home Depot to pick up the needed lumber and crowbars.)

I learned how to enter a space, assess threats and victims quickly and help people get out. My group in the class grew closer each week as we helped dummies out from under concrete and tried using fire extinguishers. We chatted about our families and gauged each other’s emergency preparations.

CERTs are given CERT bags full of rescue supplies (top)

A firefighter demonstrates how to use a fire hose (middle)

Trainer Brandon Noble (bottom)