

Raymond Derailment Proves Value of CERT Program

When a train derailment on March 30, 2023, led to a fire in downtown Raymond, Minnesota first responders sprang into action.

Despite it being the middle of the night, they weren't alone. Members of the Willmar Area Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) joined them as most of the small city — about 800 people — was evacuated to nearby Prinsburg.

CERT Programs are made up of people who live in the communities they serve. The teams are sponsored by local public safety agencies and trained to provide much-needed assistance in an emergency. They are coordinated by local partners — in this case, the Willmar Police Department and Kandiyohi County Emergency Management. Fire, Sheriff, Emergency Medical Services (EMS), or Public Health may also sponsor a CERT Program. The Minnesota Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provide support for the local sponsor partners.

"CERT is an example of how great public private partnerships can be," HSEM Deputy Director Kevin Reed said. "Private individuals step up to help their community, adding to the resources provided by public servants."

CERT personnel work together to make sure everyone's needs are met in the immediate aftermath of an emergency. In Raymond, officials called in CERT members at about 1:50 a.m. to help law enforcement officers and firefighters knock on doors and let Raymond residents know about the fire and evacuation.

The event proved the value of CERT, with members taking on different roles and assisting in everything from getting people and pets where they needed to be to keeping everyone calm in a tense situation.

While some members of the Wilmar Area CERT assisted in the evacuation, others went to the Central Minnesota Christian School and Unity Christian Reformed Church in Prinsburg to get them ready to receive the people of Raymond.

With the help of other volunteers from the church and school, CERT made sure that the 125 evacuees at the shelters had their basic needs met. Local businesses and community members provided water, coffee, blankets, and breakfast to the evacuees while they waited to hear when it would be safe to return to their homes. CERT personnel even retrieved three dogs from a residence and brought them to the evacuation site to reunite them with their family.

At 11 a.m., when they finally got the "all clear," CERT members helped get people on a bus back to their homes. They cleaned up the emergency shelters and took donations gathered at the shelters to a location in Raymond for local distribution.

"I'm extremely proud of our CERT team and the dedication, compassion and professionalism that they showed throughout the event," Willmar Police Chief Jim Felt said. The CERT Program operates year-round providing preparedness activities, assistance at events, and deploys to disaster sites when needed. Training is provided

for CERT personnel to help themselves, their family, neighbors, friends, and community when a disaster occurs.

Visit the **HSEM website** to learn more about CERT Programs and how to join or start one in your community.

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[Emergency Preparedness - Volunteer Opportunities \(mn.gov\)](https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/hsem/emergency-preparedness/Pages/volunteer-opportunities.aspx)

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For more information about CERT Programs or this article contact Jeanne Rasmussen, HSEM Volunteer Resources Coordinator at Jeanne.rasmussen@state.mn.us

Thank you!