



North Tahoe and Meeks Bay Fire Protection Districts



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PRESS RELEASE

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Celebrating Ten Years of Service with North Tahoe CERT, Recruiting for the Next Decade

Tahoe City, Calif. Jan. 27, 2020 – The North Tahoe Fire Protection District Board of Directors will recognize the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program for a decade of service to the community, and begin recruitment efforts for new members at their January 28th meeting in Tahoe City.

The Tahoe Basin experienced two significant wildfires in 2007, the Angora Fire on the south shore, and the Washoe Fire on the northwest shore. The 15-acre Washoe Fire destroyed five homes in North Tahoe Fire's service area, and resulted in bottleneck traffic and the fire station being inundated with walk-ins and flooded with phone calls from the public looking for information. An "After Action Review" of the incident prompted the late Chief Duane Whitelaw (Ret.) to hire a Public Information Officer and form a team of volunteers prepared to assist with the information gap resulting from a large-scale event. In 2009, the Citizen Emergency Information Team was officially organized with 12 volunteer members on the north shore, and over the years evolved to a district-wide FEMA-Certified CERT program with nearly 50 members.

The contingency has trained together on a monthly basis since the program's inception, receiving standardized FEMA CERT training on topics such as CERT Organization, Disaster Psychology, Disaster Medical Ops, and Shelter Operations. The team also trains and conducts drills to stand up the Emergency Operations Center, staff phone lines, deploy sign trailers, stage mobile information booths, and to deploy the District's AM 1630 radio transmitters to communicate accurate information to the public as quickly as possible. Most recently, the Board approved a retired ambulance be refurbished to serve as a "Firefighter Rehabilitation Unit." The team is trained to deploy the unit to the scene of a fire emergency or training exercise to assist in the monitoring and treatment of personnel at risk of metabolic heat buildup, dehydration and over-exertion.

The team trains with other CERT programs and agencies who participate in a number of drills from evacuations to mass casualty incidents, active shooter drills, and preparedness events. CERT has been activated for a number of notable incidents, including a door to door search of over 50 homes in need of assistance during the "Stormageddon" of 2017. In 2014 the team was activated to assist with evacuation information and community meetings during the King Fire.

"During the initial phases of an emergency, our neighbors are the first responders," said NTFPD Fire Chief Michael Schwartz. "Our CERT members are prepared to meet immediate needs during disaster response when first responders may not be available, and we hope that their accomplishments in the community will attract new recruits to join our program."

For information on becoming a member, visit www.ntfire.net/cert.

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