

CERT (COMMUNITY EMERGENCY
RESPONSE TEAM)

SAN MATEO COUNTY TIMES

DEC. 24, 2003

BELMONT

Emergency volunteer training builds backup force for next earthquake

By Amy Yarbrough
STAFF WRITER

BELMONT — The next time a big earthquake rattles the Bay Area, the city could have a cadre of volunteers trained in first-aid and light search-and-rescue ready to assist overburdened police officers and firefighters.

Starting Jan. 14, Belmont's Parks and Recreation Department will offer special training designed to help residents prepare for and help out in disasters. Called Community Emergency Response Team, or CERT training, the classes also touch on topics including fire safety, disaster psychology and terrorism.

"In an emergency, our resources are going to be stretched very thin, very quickly," said Belmont Police Sgt. Pat Halleran. "This is a way people in the neighborhoods can help themselves and really free us up."

Based on a model created by the Los Angeles City Fire Department in 1994, the training consists mostly of classroom discussions, but participants will also be taught how to use tools such as fire extinguishers and splints, said Matt Lucett, a Belmont resident and course instructor. Taught in 2 ½-hour sessions, the training will be held on Wednesdays for eight weeks.

"The concept of a CERT program is to be self-sustaining," said Lucett, who is also disaster planner and bioterrorism coordinator for San Mateo County's Office of Emergency Services. "Fortunately, we don't have these things too often."

Plans are to continue the training several times a year, Halleran said, and the city recently sent out letters to all the neighborhood associations inviting them to participate.

CERT teams, established in hun-

dreds of communities across the country, can also be vital not just in natural disasters, but following major accidents, Halleran said. This summer, when an elderly driver crashed into a crowded farmers' market in Santa Monica, some of the first people on the scene — donning green hard-hats — were CERT volunteers.

Halleran said because their training is not extensive, CERT volunteers shouldn't be considered a replacement for firefighters or teams that do urban search-and-rescue.

"If they are going to help out, naturally we want to make sure they have the training behind them," he said.

CERT training will be held Jan. 14 to March 3, on Wednesdays from 7 to 9:30 p.m. The deadline to register for the program, which cost \$42, is Jan. 7. For more information, call Hilory Brown at the Belmont Police Department at 595-7400.