

# The Educator



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## Community Emergency Response Team on Campus

By James Sawyer and Karim Magallanes

**Editor's Note:** This article was written and submitted to The Educator a few weeks before the events at Virginia Tech University last April. We would like to know how your institutions have responded to that situation and what changes, if any, your institutions have made. Send your comments to Academics Practice Specialty Administrator Wayne Jones at [wjones@sosu.edu](mailto:wjones@sosu.edu).

All communities are susceptible and vulnerable to various hazards, some of which are more prevalent and dangerous than others. Burby (1998) defines a hazard as any event or condition that presents a threat to life, property and social and/or economic activities. Waugh (1999) relates that

hazards may be classified as natural (e.g., tornadoes and floods), technological (e.g., chemical releases and nuclear accidents) or man-made (e.g., terrorism and military activity). Each of these hazards has an expected frequency, or probability, which is simply a calculation of how likely it is to occur in a given time period (Drebek & Hoetmer, 1991).

Disaster-related losses in the U.S. continue to rise (Mileti, 1999). At all levels, organizations and governments are adjusting their behavior and policies to reflect the importance of reducing damage caused by

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## CHEA Board Issues Resolution of Support

**Editor's Note:** According to the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), proposed federal rulemaking could change how university programs are accredited. ASSE's Educational Standards Committee (ESC) is currently examining this issue. Direct all questions and comments to Dr. Jim Ramsay, ESC Chair, at [james.ramsay@erau.edu](mailto:james.ramsay@erau.edu).

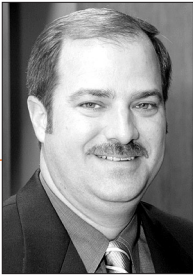
At its regularly scheduled spring board and annual meeting held in Washington, the board of directors of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) issued a resolution supporting the actions of its president Judith Eaton at the latest

U.S. Department of Education negotiated rulemaking session. At that session, Eaton dissented to a proposal concerning making transfer of credit subject to federal regulatory control rather than to institutional authority and also dissented to a proposal that would require accreditors, instead of the institutions, to be responsible for setting "brightline indicators" which must be approved by the Department of Education and would be used to judge what counts as successful institutional performance.

The board also reiterated CHEA's longstanding commitment to place the responsibility for student learning outcomes in the hands of the individual institutions, working with accreditors. The current negotiated rulemaking sessions threaten this successful institution/accreditor relationship that has helped make the U.S. higher education system a model for the world.

"An important and delicate balance is shifting. In an ideal world, accreditation standards are the

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Wayne D. Jones

## Administrator's Message

**H**appy summer break for many of you and happy classes to others. We apologize for the lateness of this final edition of *The Educator* for the 2006-07 ASSE year. However, it does speak to a concern that the Academics Practice Specialty (APS) officers and ASSE staff have about our technical publication: lack of articles.

We certainly understand that we academicians need to publish and that we need to publish in peer-reviewed journals; hence, the creation and continuation of APS's own *Journal of Safety, Health and Environmental Research*. The latest issue is available at <http://www.asse.org/academicsjournal>.

At the same time, it is the responsibility of APS, as it is of all of the ASSE practice specialties, branches and common interest groups, to publish three

issues every year. Given the existence of JSHER, we need only to provide 8,000-10,000 words to ASSE staff to make an 8-page technical publication.

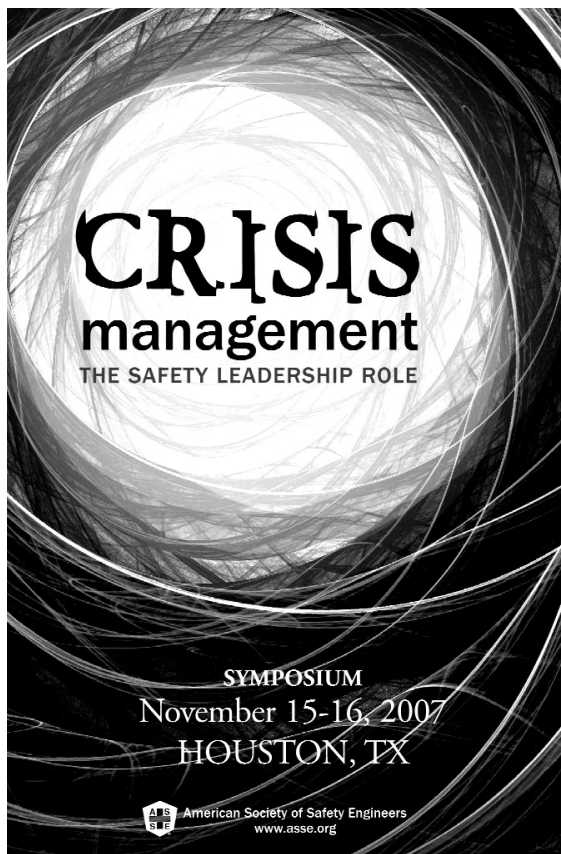
How can you get involved and help us? Late last year, George Kezerle from Texas State Technical College in Marshall, TX, volunteered to be *The Educator* Editor. Four other APS members also have volunteered to help. Two of these educators, Helmut Paschold, P.E., CSP, from Ohio University and Dr. Leigh Ann Blunt from Central Missouri University published in the last issue of *The Educator*. In addition, Dr. Blunt submitted an article written by two graduate students at Central Missouri that not only helped us complete this issue, but unbeknownst to them, turned out to be a most timely piece.

Contact George Kezerle ([george.kezerle@marshall.tstc.edu](mailto:george.kezerle@marshall.tstc.edu)), APS Assistant

Administrator Hamid Fonooni ([fonoonih@ecu.edu](mailto:fonoonih@ecu.edu)), me ([wjones@sosu.edu](mailto:wjones@sosu.edu)) or Rennie Heath, manager of practice specialties at ASSE ([rheath@asse.org](mailto:rheath@asse.org)) to submit an article that you feel would be of value to your fellow academics. Ask a colleague to write about a safety, health and environmental topic that could be useful to other APS members or submit a quality student article.

Due to the delay in publishing this issue, we decided to go to an electronic format. What do you think?

Thank you for your patience and get involved!



## Academics Practice Specialty

### The Educator

#### OFFICERS

##### ADMINISTRATOR

Wayne D. Jones, Ed.D.  
580.452.2292  
[wjones@sosu.edu](mailto:wjones@sosu.edu)

##### ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR

Hamid Fonooni, Ph.D.  
252.328.9726  
[fonoonih@ecu.edu](mailto:fonoonih@ecu.edu)

##### NEWSLETTER EDITOR

George E. Kezerle Jr.  
[george.kezerle@marshall.tstc.edu](mailto:george.kezerle@marshall.tstc.edu)

##### ASSISTANT NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Helmut Paschold  
915.920.7233  
[paschold@ohio.edu](mailto:paschold@ohio.edu)

#### COMMITTEES

##### AWARDS & HONORS

Michael Behm, Ph.D.  
[behmm@ecu.edu](mailto:behmm@ecu.edu)

##### CONFERENCES & FORUM

Mark Friend, Ed.D.  
[mark.friend@erau.edu](mailto:mark.friend@erau.edu)

##### MEMBERSHIP

David Batts, Ed.D.  
[battsd@mail.ecu.edu](mailto:battsd@mail.ecu.edu)

##### NOMINATIONS

Paul Specht, Ph.D.  
[pspecht@millersville.edu](mailto:pspecht@millersville.edu)

##### STAFF LIAISON

Rennie Heath  
847.768.3436  
[rheath@asse.org](mailto:rheath@asse.org)

##### NEWSLETTER DESIGN & PRODUCTION

Susan Carlson  
ASSE headquarters staff  
[scarlson@asse.org](mailto:scarlson@asse.org)

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## **CERT on Campus**

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extreme events. Hazard mitigation is accepted as good practice, and many government jurisdictions now require it. Higher education institutions have an interest on many levels in becoming more disaster-resistant. Administrators, faculty and staff realize that improving their campus' resistance to disaster will not only protect their own lives and those of their students, it will also safeguard the campus' instruction, research and public service functions.

Hazards represent a wide array of threats to the instructional, research and public service missions of higher education institutions. In the past several years, disasters have affected college and university campuses with disturbing frequency. Damages to buildings and infrastructure, as well as interruptions to the institutional mission, result in significant losses. These losses can be substantially reduced or eliminated through comprehensive pre-disaster planning and mitigation actions (Department of Homeland Security, 2007).

Colleges and universities are at risk from the same hazards as the communities in which they are located. It is impossible to anticipate every possible major emergency or disaster situation that a higher education institution or community may encounter and equally impossible to prepare detailed plans for incidents where the nature and extent of the event or condition is not known beforehand. Following a major disaster, first responders who provide fire and medical services will not be able to meet the demand for their services.

The adoption of the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program on a college or university campus would empower faculty, staff and students to help in local disaster response. The theory behind CERT is based on a simple observation. In major emergencies, professional emergency services are quickly overloaded. Common mass emergencies include floods, hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes and tornadoes. These events are all capable of creating mass emergencies (New Jersey Office of Emergency Management, 2007).

When needed, the CERT could coordinate university efforts with the local emergency management agency. The CERT would continue to monitor and coordinate

events until the emergency situation is stabilized sufficiently to allow a return to regular organizational operation. At an appropriate time, the CERT would debrief with each of the units involved in an emergency in an ongoing effort to improve institutional response to crisis situations.

## **CERT Overview**

### **History**

The Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) created the program in 1985 based on the fact that in case of a large disaster, first-responders will quickly become inundated and will not be able to reach all people in need of assistance in a timely manner. They recognized that citizens would very likely be on their own during the early stages of a catastrophic disaster. Accordingly, LAFD decided that some basic training in disaster survival and rescue skills was in order to improve the ability of citizens to survive until responders or other assistance could arrive (Department of Homeland Security, 2007).

In 1993, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) adopted the program and started promoting the concept with standardized training nationwide. The Emergency Management Institute (EMI), in cooperation with the LAFD, expanded the CERT materials to make them applicable to all hazards in 1994. FEMA still bases the program on volunteers, but by standardizing the training, the agency feels it can ensure a consistent level of training and performance nationwide. Standardized training allows volunteer emergency organizations and government officials from any jurisdiction to be familiar with capabilities and limitations and with how to effectively communicate missions to CERT members/volunteers from other jurisdictions.

### **Beyond Disaster Response**

Initially, CERT programs were developed to help communities take care of themselves in the aftermath of a major disaster when first responders are overwhelmed or unable to respond because of communication or transportation difficulties. CERTs have become much more than originally envisioned and have proven to be an active and vital part of community preparedness and response capability. CERTs are an investment of local government's time and resources. To capitalize on this investment, program sponsors can

view CERT members as a volunteer resource that can assist with public safety activities. Such an approach will actively involve members in serving their communities beyond disaster response and add value to the CERT program (Arlington, VA Office of Emergency Management, 2007).

## **Standards & Protocols**

The best source of help in an emergency or disaster is the paid or volunteer professional responder. However, if they are not available to address immediate lifesaving needs or to protect property, CERT members can help. CERTs are not intended to replace a community's response capability but rather to serve as an important supplement to it. The agency sponsoring the CERT program creates a volunteer resource that is part of the community's operational capability following a disaster. That agency should develop training standards for CERT personnel and protocols for their activation and use.

CERT members must keep their safety in mind as their first priority. CERT volunteers must know their capabilities and the limitations of their training and equipment and work within those limitations. When deployed appropriately, CERTs can complement and enhance first-response capability in neighborhoods and workplaces by ensuring the safety of themselves and their families working outward to the neighborhood or office and beyond until first responders arrive. CERTs can then assist first-response personnel as directed. CERT members can also help with nonemergency projects that help improve the safety of the community (Citizen Corps, 2007).

## **Community Emergency Response Team Training**

Local government prepares for everyday emergencies. However, an emergency or disaster can overwhelm the community's immediate response capability. The primary reason for CERT training is to give people the decision-making, organizational and practical skills to offer immediate assistance to family members, neighbors and associates while waiting for help. While people will respond to others in need without the training, the goal of the CERT program is to help people do so effectively and efficiently without placing

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themselves in unnecessary danger (Citizen Corps, 2007).

The CERT course is taught in the community by a trained team of first responders who have completed a CERT train-the-trainer course conducted by their state training office for emergency management. The CERT curriculum trains community members in basic response functions to help them during a disaster.

**Several colleges and universities have used the CERT curriculum to help prepare their faculty, staff and students for disasters.**

CERT teams are organized locally. Businesses, churches, neighborhoods, schools and other interested citizens who wish to be prepared and to respond in case of emergency can take training. Individual responsibility, safety and personal preparedness are stressed during the course. After completion of the training and a final simulation, CERT members become a part of the local response plan. Many jurisdictions provide

advanced training to interested CERT members. Advanced training varies by jurisdiction but can include flagging, advanced search and rescue, and advanced medical training. By training local volunteers to participate in such activities, first responders can go about their duties and have the additional manpower to do such activities as directing traffic away from a disaster site.

Public response to the CERT program has been overwhelming. According to Scrocca (2004), rather than having difficulty filling slots for training, most communities are encountering the opposite challenge of too much citizen interest. Because colleges and universities face the same hazards as the communities in which they are located, there is no reason to believe that they would not have the same high level of interest that has been wit-

nessed nationwide. By using the CERT curriculum to fit the local community needs, a college or university would be more prepared, and the surrounding community would benefit as well. Faculty, staff and students who participated in the training would be able to take their knowledge home with them.

Several colleges and universities have used the CERT curriculum to help prepare their faculty, staff and students for disasters (CERT Los Angeles, 2007). Each succeeding semester, new schools are taking advantage of local trainers' knowledge to better prepare their campus CERT volunteers. CERT members would be of great help when responding to the devastating effects of a disaster on a college or university campus.

They would be able to extinguish small fires that might have been started during or after the event. Others would be able to perform damage assessment and to assist in search-and-rescue efforts. Personnel more proficient in medical skills could provide first aid to injured victims. CERT would provide a huge relief to the first responders of the local community as well as to the college or university administration.

### **CERT as a Mitigation Strategy**

The goal of mitigation is to withstand the effects of probable hazardous events without unacceptable losses or interruptions and to get back to business with minimal interruption of education, research and community service. Mitigation is defined as "sustained action taken to reduce long-term risks to people and their property from hazards and their effects" (Godchalk et al. 1999, p. 50). Mitigation includes any activities that prevent an emergency, reduce the chance of an emergency happening or lessen the damaging effects of unavoidable emergencies (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2007).

A core assumption of mitigation is that current dollars invested in mitigation practices will significantly reduce the demand for future expenses by lessening the amount needed for emergency recovery, repair and reconstruction. A properly planned and executed mitigation strategy can yield several results, including: 1) saving lives and property; 2) speeding recovery following disasters; 3) reducing future vulnerability through sustainable development and/or redevelopment; and 4) expe-

ditioning both pre-disaster and post-disaster grant funding (Godchalk et al. 1999).

CERT is an effective mitigation tool in its own right. However, the program can be much more effective when used in conjunction with other mitigation measures. An almost endless list of structural and nonstructural mitigation tools is available to colleges and universities. Other programs include, but are not limited to, the Disaster Resistant Universities (DRU) program, the StormReady program and the Pre-disaster Mitigation Grant (PDM) program. All mitigation initiatives should be addressed within a mitigation plan encompassed in a comprehensive emergency management program.

### **Summary**

All communities, including colleges and universities, are susceptible and vulnerable to various hazards. The adoption of the CERT program on a university campus would empower faculty, staff and students to help in response to local disasters. CERTs can also be used for performing functions outside disaster response.

When deployed appropriately, CERTs can complement and enhance first-response capability in neighborhoods and workplaces. By using the CERT curriculum to fit the local community needs, a higher education institution would be more prepared and the surrounding community would benefit as well.

Interest in CERT training continues to rise within the higher education community. Several colleges and universities have used the CERT curriculum to help prepare their faculty, staff and students for disasters. Many exemplary university CERT programs are currently in place. CERT would provide a huge relief to the first responders of the local community as well as to the administration of the institution affected by a disaster.

Although CERT is an effective stand-alone mitigation tool, the program can be much more effective when used in conjunction with other mitigation strategies. No mitigation initiative is as effective alone as when used in synergy with other components of a comprehensive mitigation plan. Colleges and universities can avail themselves of a wide variety of mitigation measures. All mitigation initiatives should be addressed within a mitigation plan contained within a comprehensive emergency management program. ■

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*James Sawyer and Karim Magallanes are graduate students in occupational safety management at the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg, MO. Leigh Ann Blunt, assistant professor of safety in the Department of Safety Sciences, submitted their paper.*

## CHEA Resolution of Support

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product of consultation between institutions and the accrediting organizations that institutions have created. Institutions agree that these standards will be used for judgments about institutional quality. The proposed rules upend this ideal world by asserting that accreditation standards, however determined, must meet the test of federal acceptance, thereby federalizing accreditation," Eaton said.

Specifically, from CHEA's perspective, the proposed rules would:

- establish the federal advisory committee as a "Ministry of Quality" with comprehensive authority to judge academic programs and disciplines on campuses throughout the country;
- position accrediting organizations as government contractors imposing government standards of quality;
- insist on a "one-size-fits-all," bureaucratic approach to quality that ignores the diverse missions of institutions and sets tangible benefits of a collegiate experience as the primary indicator of higher education effectiveness;
- constitute an unprecedented federal usurpation of authority to make academic judgments, heretofore the province of colleges and universities.

Over the past 5 years, CHEA has published 13 papers, advisories and commentaries that provide suggestions and tools to address student learning outcomes and institutional performance. The recommendations would both satisfy calls for institutional accountability and preserve the institution/accreditor relationship.

CHEA calls on institutions and programs to:

- routinely provide students and prospective students with information about student learning outcomes and institutional and program performance in terms of these outcomes;
- regularly report aggregate information

about student learning outcomes to external constituents;

- supplement this information with additional evidence about the soundness of institutional and program operations and overall effectiveness with respect to mission fulfillment as well as concrete evidence of how they benefit students in other ways.

**The CHEA board agrees that there is a legitimate federal interest in higher education effectiveness and accountability, but this does not require federal intervention in the institution/accreditor relationship.**

CHEA calls on accrediting organizations to:

- establish standards, policies and review processes that visibly and clearly expect institutions and programs to discharge the above responsibilities with respect to public communication about student learning outcomes;

- clearly communicate to accreditation's constituents the fact that accredited status signifies

that student achievement levels are appropriate and acceptable;

- provide information about specific proficiencies or deficiencies in aggregate student academic performance if these played a role in an accreditation action or decision about an institution or program.

The board agrees that there is a legitimate federal interest in higher education effectiveness and accountability, but this does not require federal intervention in the institution/accreditor relationship.

To view the resolution, visit [www.chea.org/pdf/CHEA\\_board\\_of\\_directors\\_resolution.pdf](http://www.chea.org/pdf/CHEA_board_of_directors_resolution.pdf). For more information on CHEA's proposals concerning outcomes, refer to Accreditation and Accountability: A CHEA Special Report at [www.chea.org/pdf/accreditation\\_and\\_accountability.pdf](http://www.chea.org/pdf/accreditation_and_accountability.pdf). ■

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