CERT

NASSAU COUNTY

CERT IS WHAT **YOU** MAKE IT!

# 2013 CERT Regional Exercise

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http://www.nassaucountyny.gov/agencies/OEM/CC/CERT/brief.html

On September 22, 2013 Nassau County CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) held its annual Regional Exercise in North Woodmere Park in Valley Stream NY, which is located in the southwestern part of Nassau County near John F. Kennedy International Airport. This exercise provided an opportunity for nearly 160 CERT members to reinforce the skills that they acquired in the Basic Class, and offered several opportunities to learn new skills. The drill also allowed Nassau County CERT members to work alongside their counterparts from New York City and Suffolk County.

Obstacle Course Station

In support of the exercise, an additional 70 members from other agencies were in attendance in supporting roles. Supporting organizations included the American Red Cross, local Fire Departments and their Junior Fire Fighters, Nassau County Police Explorers, N.Y. Grey Cadets, Boy Scouts, and other youth volunteers. The Scouts and Grey Cadets served in the role of victims and wore moulage to lend a sense of realism to the event.

The New York metropolitan region is still rebuilding after being pummeled by Superstorm Sandy one year ago, and we strove to apply many of the valuable lessons learned from the storm, and to forge stronger response plans for Nassau County and for our neighboring counties.

This year, eighteen Nassau County ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Services) radio operators, and ARES Mutual Aid Teams from Queens, Brooklyn, and Manhattan, aided CERT by providing communications for Exercise Control, and to offer an added layer of safety and security. The leadership of Nassau County ARES, RACES (Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services) and CERT collaborated completely on this project by jointly approaching it as an opportunity to test the distribution of ARES assets

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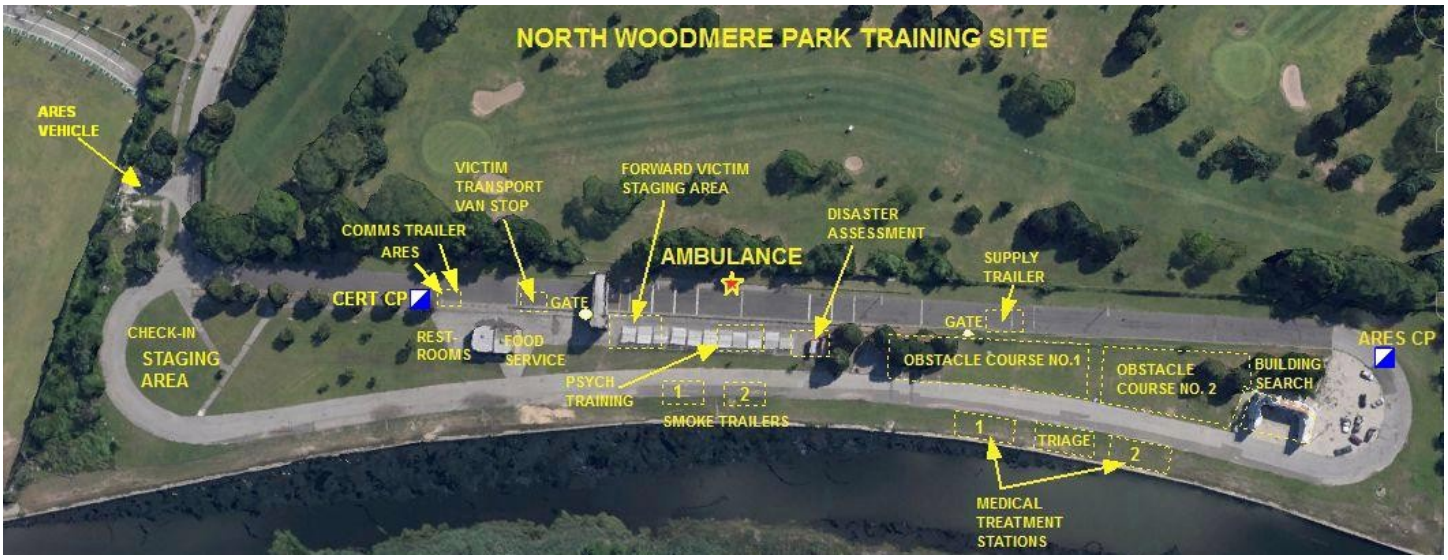


Map of exercise site

among our served agencies, just as if the exercise were an actual emergency activation.

**Nassau County ARES Assisted by NYC Area Mutual Aid Team Members**

Many of our Amateur Radio Operators serve in several capacities, including ARES, RACES, ARC (American Red Cross), CERT, and Skywarn. Some are also First Responders who are not always available, or who are limited to when they can volunteer as radio operators. And, like many of our CERTs and neighbors, some were directly impacted by the serious effects of Superstorm Sandy and were not available at all.

ARES Team Members at 2013 CERT Regional Exercise

These realities led the leadership responsible for planning this year's cooperative Regional Exercise to incorporate an *additional layer of realism* to the exercise and to create an even broader operation. In doing so, Nassau County ARES conducted their annual SET (Simulated Emergency Test) exercise *during* the CERT drill. While the SET was a separate operation conducted only on ARES radio frequencies, it shared the same broad scope of the CERT exercise and tested the full capabilities and assets of ARES to carry out their appointed roles with RACES, the ARC and CERT.

Nassau County ARES net control members at the AK1NS* OES station (Official Emergency Station) and the ARC radio station NC2RC in Mineola conducted a simplex voice, packet and NBEMS test. These digital transmission modes are used for transmitting and receiving text and ICS forms without commercial power or the internet. ARES did so with the assistance of an additional 25 volunteer amateur radio operators external to the CERT exercise. These "hams" successfully communicated over 280 square miles of Nassau County and its adjoining region, and provided critical simplex data for future emergency communications planning.

Our CERT members followed the standard protocol of responding to the exercise and reporting directly to the Staging Area, where they were briefed, formed into teams, and deployed. The CERTs received a *Welcome*

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* Radio Call Sign AK1NS; call signs used throughout will be underlined.

*and Scenario* introduction as well as a *Safety Briefing*. Those who were assigned to operate an FRS radio also received a *Communications Briefing*. The teams received further briefings at each Training Station that were more specific to that Station's scenario and function.

Disaster Assessment Station

A new addition to this year's drill was the implementation of a "Quick Tag" system that gave all participants an ID that was specific to the day's exercise. This method was tested as part of a larger plan to roll out a more sophisticated ID system and a more enhanced resource management system, perhaps in the near future. The new ID would incorporate a member's critical information and training certifications securely embedded within the badge. During an event, these IDs could be scanned "in and out", via a handheld scanner. This procedure would provide a real-time account of assets in the field.

CERTs responded to several Training Stations that where designed to challenge their basic training skills and to better equip them for responding to events in everyday life. CERTs also utilized NIMS, ICS, and associated forms to document their actions during exercise play.

**Training Stations for the 2013 Regional Exercise**

***Preliminary Damage Assessment***

A new station introduced this year to introduce CERTs to the procedures and criteria used for assessing structures for damage was implemented in the Regional Exercise. The mentors staffing the Damage Assessment station from the American Red Cross provided important training to CERT members. Preliminary Damage Assessment was one vital mission that CERT was asked to undertake after Superstorm Sandy.

***Disaster Medical Operations***

Disaster Medical Operations consisted of three stations developed and staffed by Suffolk County CERT members, that focused on Triage and Emergency First Aid to victims requiring transportation. A large number of "victims" exhibiting a variety of symptoms and obvious wounds were role-played by youth members of Scout and Venturing units, Fire Department Juniors, and members of the N.Y. Grey Cadets. The simulated wounds were applied (and removed) by the Nassau County CERT Moulage Unit.

CERT Members Apply Emergency First Aid to "Victims"

***Search and Rescue***

Building Search and Rescue provided CERTs with a simulation of a commercial as well as a residential building., and the hazards of a search for victims under darkened conditions with debris present. The scenario for

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Search and Rescue was designed and staffed by New York City CERT.

### *Disaster Psychology*

The Disaster Psychology Station, developed and staffed by Suffolk County CERT, offered a classroom setting where teams learned how to take better care of themselves and their teammates, and to recognize the warning signs of someone in potential distress during a traumatic event.

### *Obstacle Course or Field Hazards*

Situational Awareness training was provided by the "Obstacle Course" Training Station, developed to teach and to evaluate teams on their knowledge of what to do and what not to do when encountering certain critical situations. The Field Hazards that were simulated included, among others: HazMat issues, downed power lines, and searching for and extricating victims in or near dangerous areas.

### *Smoke House*

CERTs were deployed to the Smoke House trailer to learn the proper method of escape during a fire. The Smoke House simulation illustrates another example of why CERT training is extremely valuable in everyday situations. The Port Washington Fire Department supported this exercise once again with their Smoke Trailer.

CERT members exit the Smoke House trailer in a cloud of smoke

### *Basic Radio Skills*

CERT teams communicated using their FRS radios, reporting their location and status, and any other occurrences to the CERT Command Post.

Kathleen Ernst RN as a Safety Officer briefing CERT teams

### *ICS and Command Post Operations*

The 2013 Regional Exercise was planned and conducted using the Incident Command System (ICS) as the basis of exercise management. CERT members are encouraged to become certified in ICS by taking online or classroom training in ICS-100 and ICS-200.

The CERT Command Post served as Exercise Control, coordinating the drill from the CERT Command Trailer. CERT members at the Command Post filled ICS positions as Incident Commander, Planning Section Chief, Operations Section Chief, and Logistics Section Chief, as well as section Deputies and subordinate positions. The Administrative Section Chief performed his

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Michelle Reeves, KD2EXD, and Elena Germani
in the CERT Command Trailer

duties at the Staging Area, which was run by a Staging Area Manager and his staff.

The Staging Area was the assembly point for CERT members and contained the Check-in/Check-out location. All Mission, Safety and Communications Briefings were conducted at the Staging Area. Operations was in communication with the Staging Area Manager and provided deployment instructions, and teams were assembled, briefed and deployed from Staging.

## Regional CERT Exercise an Annual Event

The activities of 9/22/13 will be recalled as our first post-Sandy joint exercise, but it will certainly not be our last. The benefits and experiences provided to our combined members during this day were plentiful, but the *citizens* of Nassau County, and our larger region, were the true beneficiaries of the event.

Because of the efforts of volunteer CERT, ARES, ARC members, Scouts, Fire Departments, and so many other outstanding volunteers who participated, contributed, taught, learned, and tested the strengths and weaknesses of our emergency response plans, we are now better prepared to assist all of our communities in times of need. Thank you, and congratulations to all, and for a job well done!

Youths from a number of organizations supported
this exercise, posing as "victims"

## Acronyms & Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| **ARC** | **American Red Cross** |
| **ARES** | **Amateur Radio Emergency Service** |
| **CERT** | **Community Emergency Response Team** |
| **FRS** | **Family Radio Service** |
| **HazMat** | **Hazardous Materials** |
| **ICS** | **Incident Command System** |
| **ID** | **Identification** |
| **NBEMS** | **Narrow Band Emergency Messaging Software** |
| **NIMS** | **National Incident Management System** |
| **NYC** | **New York City** |
| **RACES** | **Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services** |
| **SET** | **Simulated Emergency Test** |
| **Skywarn** | **A civilian volunteer weather spotter group sponsored by the National Weather Service** |