

# PRELIMINARY DAMAGE ASSESSMENT

CERT Use of the San Marcos Fire Department Damage Assessment Form

**THE PURPOSE:** One of the missions that San Marcos CERT members may be called upon to do is to report to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) how badly the city is hurt after an earthquake, fire, or other disaster. This information is used by the EOC to determine which parts of the city need the emergency resources the most. It also advises the EOC as to how many first responders will be needed.

There eventually will be *formal* damage assessments conducted by the city's Building Department, and that formal information gathering is used to report loss estimates to FEMA. We want to always refer to the CERT damage assessment as a *preliminary* damage assessment, so that those efforts do not get confused with each other. There may also be a "Windshield" damage assessment conducted by Sheriff and Fire Department units, and this is also a source for potential confusion. If we all consistently use the terms preliminary, formal and windshield, we can keep all of this straight.

In order to standardize the information in a consistent order and format, we use the Damage Assessment Form. The form simply lists the addresses assessed and provides boxes to report the types of hazards, the severity of the damage, the injuries of victims, and the status of the roadways. The boxes require numbers, not checkmarks. This is so you can report multiple victims and hazards at the same address. As you read across the form, this becomes quite clear. Each form has spaces to report a total of 16 addresses.

**THE PROCESS:** All San Marcos CERT members are encouraged to print out 10 copies of the Damage Assessment form and keep them with their CERT equipment. This gives them the capacity to record 160 addresses. A possible scenario that illustrates the use of the form is a major event where homes and buildings are damaged, and phone lines are inoperable. As trained, CERT members will evaluate and treat themselves, their families and their neighbors, and then report to their pre-designated CERT Assembly Points. There, they will listen to their FRS or Ham radios for instructions. The EOC may then assign the mission to the CERT Areas to use the form to assess some or all streets in their CERT Area. One member will assume the

role of Area Team Leader and might assign the members into teams (never less than two members per team) to cover and assess the addresses within that area. The process is meant to give decision-makers **quick** information, and members must balance speed with accuracy in completing the forms, while never compromising their safety. The Leader keeps track of his/her people and their assignments, and has them return the forms back to the assembly area when the assessments are complete. If the roadways are passable, the Leader will arrange to have the forms taken to the EOC. If not, the information will be radioed in via FRS or Ham frequencies as directed by the EOC.

**STRUCTURE DAMAGE LEVELS:** As a reminder, the three levels of structural damage are defined as follows.

LIGHT:

- Superficial Damage
- Broken Windows
- Fallen or cracked plaster
- Minor damage to the interior contents

MODERATE:

- Visible signs of damage
- Decorative work damaged or fallen
- Many visible cracks in plaster
- Major damage to interior content

HEAVY: (CERT members will not enter)

- Partial or total collapse
- Tilting
- Obvious structural instability
- Heavy smoke or fire
- Hazardous materials inside
- Gas leaks