

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix's Central And St. Joseph High Schools Join Teen CERT

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ST. CROIX – Half a dozen students trapped in a classroom damaged by a major earthquake. Another student trapped under a slab of concrete while a small fire erupts nearby. These are the incidents that St. Croix Central High School and St. Joseph's High School students responded to in disaster drills held over the past two weeks, the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) made known this afternoon.

The drills were designed to test the students' newly acquired skills from the Teen CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) Program. CERT is a national volunteer program, sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), to train

adults and teens in disaster preparedness and emergency response. VITEMA manages the Teen CERT program for the USVI.

“I extend my congratulations to our new Teen CERT members and welcome them to the ranks of emergency management,” said Mona Barnes, VITEMA director. “As Teen CERT members they have accepted the awesome responsibility of being the ones that are called on in an emergency. This is what community service is about and I applaud them for deciding to be of service to their community.”

The 57 students spent a week in classroom and field training learning basic disaster response skills including: using fire extinguishers to put out small fires; assisting emergency responders; conducting light search and rescue; setting up medical treatment areas; applying basic first aid techniques; and helping reduce survivor stress. The course culminated with a disaster drill to reinforce skills learned during training.

Following four hours of the grueling and fast-paced disaster drills held January 27 and February 10 instructors agreed that all 57 students had demonstrated a basic understanding of managing an incident when first responders are not immediately available. The students established an Incident Command Post and identified team leaders to manage logistics, search and rescue, medical operations, and fire suppression.

“These students learned valuable skills that will last them a lifetime and help them take care of their families, their school and their community,” said Todd Patton, VITEMA deputy director for Planning and Preparedness. “It is the same skills and training that are taught during the adult courses and I encourage them to continue learning.”

St. Joseph’s High School and St. Croix Central High School is the fourth and fifth US Virgin Islands high schools to join the Teen CERT program. Ivanna Eudora Kean High School on St. Thomas and Seventh Day Adventist High School and Education Complex High School on St. Croix are also members of the Teen CERT program.

For more information about Teen CERT contact Joel Connors, VITEMA Community Engagement Coordinator, at 340-774-2244 or email joel.connors@vitema.vi.gov.