One Knock at a Time —
CERT Volunteers Help Neighbors Get Ready



Figure 1 - Lynn and Tami in Watsonville

A friendly conversation at the doorstep can turn concern about winter storms into a plan. Throughout October, Santa Cruz County CERT volunteers brought practical guidance and a reassuring community presence to flood-prone neighborhoods ahead of anticipated El Niño conditions and higher-than-normal ocean waves.

Working with the Office of Response, Recovery and Resilience (OR3) and the Sheriff's Department, 46 CERT volunteers contributed 290 service hours across twelve outreach shifts. From Felton Grove and Paradise Park to coastal neighborhoods and Watsonville, they reached nearly 1,600 residences. Approximately one-third of the outreach involved face-to-face conversations; door hangers extended the effort to other homes.

Using materials developed by OR3 and the Sheriff's Department, CERT volunteers helped neighbors learn about CruzAware emergency alerts, evacuation zones, go-bags, sandbag locations, and storm safety. English- and Spanish-language handouts gave households information to keep and share. Volunteers also explained how new "Evacuated" door hangers can help responders identify homes residents have left during an evacuation. The outreach put Unit 1 of CERT Basic Training into action—neighbors helping neighbors prepare before an emergency.



Figure 2 - Bonnie and Sara talking with homeowner

The most rewarding feedback came from neighbors themselves. Many residents expressed gratitude and said the outreach helped them begin preparing for winter. At shift debriefs, volunteers described the experience as timely, relevant, and closely connected to CERT's mission and values. Those positive exchanges showed that preparedness is about more than supplies—it is also about community connections.

Teamwork made the effort possible. Volunteers from across the county joined each outing, getting to know neighborhoods beyond their own team areas. Working in pairs, partners took turns talking with residents and recording visits in the Knock and Talk app. Five volunteers provided Spanish-language support as needed. In Paradise Park, the

resident Safety Team joined CERT volunteers, sharing local knowledge to help target outreach and identify vacation-only homes.



Figure 3 Watsonville activity with Maria, Tami, Bonnie, Lynn, JoMarie and Joyce

Volunteers adapted and learned along the way. They practiced new app features for Disaster Service Worker (DSW) identification and address lookup, while the county GIS contact improved the display of local addresses. On days above 85°F, teams took added safety precautions and frequent breaks. Their experiences also informed practical improvements for future outreach, including planning, supplies, shift-lead preparation, and reporting resources.

Some volunteers had graduated from CERT training just one week earlier and brought fresh enthusiasm to the activation. Alongside fellow volunteers, they turned classroom lessons into meaningful service. OR3 and the Sheriff's Department expressed deep gratitude for the volunteers' energy, professionalism, and commitment. OR3 and the Sheriff also shared an overview of the flood-preparedness activation with the County Board of Supervisors. Here is a slide demonstrating the outreach to date of the presentation:



To everyone who volunteered, led a shift, supported a partner, or helped a resident prepare: thank you. Your time and care made this outreach possible and helped neighbors take meaningful steps toward getting ready for winter. When the next

opportunity to serve arrives, consider signing up—one knock and one conversation at a time, we can keep building a better-prepared community.





