

## **CERT Backpacks and Equipment**

### **By: William P. Flinn**

When you go through initial CERT training, you are issued the standard helmet, a CERT vest, and a backpack containing some basic tools and supplies. After you leave CERT training, you will find that there are many more items that you should have in your kit, and the basic backpack just isn't large enough or sturdy enough to handle it all. And if you pack the basic backpack full of "stuff," it is going to get heavy, and the backpack just isn't sturdy enough (in my humble opinion) to contain all of it.

I prefer to take a more modular approach to my gear. This allows me to distribute the contents and weight over a few different containers. I just don't need every single piece of equipment on my person at all times. There are certain tools and supplies that I do need with me all the time, for example, but those things will fit into a smaller tactical backpack. I put all my first-aid and medical supplies into a pack all their own. And I use a larger pack to keep things that I might need at the end of the day, or after a long search and rescue.

This review will discuss all of these packs, their contents, and some of the benefits that I have found from departing from the standard issue CERT gear.

My CERT packs consist of essentially three packs: A small tactical pack for carrying the gear I will need with me all the time, a waist pack for medical and first-aid supplies, and a larger pack for keeping such things as meals, extra clothes, rain gear, hygiene supplies, and extra consumables for my medical kit and the smaller CERT pack:



This is the standard issue CERT helmet, vest, and backpack that I was issued when I went through my initial training. The backpack has gotten better over the last few years, but they still aren't as sturdy as I would like. I was issued a newer CERT pack when I went through Instructor training, but the zippers broke after a few times using the pack. I then transferred everything over to one of my spare tactical packs. I also replaced the helmet, which you can see in a separate review. And I purchased a more sturdy CERT vest:



I'm big into packs with lots of MOLLE webbing, because that allows me to easily attach things externally:



Here you see a few of my external attachments: knife, trauma shears, and large zip ties. The large zip ties come in handy for securing loose objects - they are very strong. Not shown are some additional attachments such as a foldable camping saw, walking pole, and trenching tool:



External attachments seen here are knee pads, a large crescent wrench, "Figure-9" carabineers, and electrical tape. The figure-9 carabineers are used for making attachment points to use with rope or 550 Paracord. Electrical tape is used for just about everything. That and duct tape are critical items to have in your CERT pack:



Contained in the smaller pouch on the front, at the top, are a whistle, glass breaking/strap cutting tool, and nitrile gloves. I carry several of the glass breaking/strap cutting tools in my vehicle and elsewhere. These are specifically made for breaking vehicle glass and cutting seat belts if you need to extricate yourself or others from a burning vehicle or other similar emergency situation:



Next pocket down on the front of the pack, glow sticks, Cliff Bars, the CERT Field Guide, and various water-proof CERT booklets with forms and notepads to use for documenting a scene. I carry lots of Sharpies, and also a waterproof pen to use with the waterproof notepads. Small, hi-energy snacks, such as Cliff Bars, are a necessity:



Larger compartment in the middle of the pack: water, "Mechanix" gloves (I would actually be wearing these most of the time), lumber pencils (for marking buildings that are being searched), more glow sticks, N95 respirators, 5-Hour Energy drinks, headlight, and an "Ambu" CPR face mask. As you will see, I carry lots of water. The 5-Hour Energy drinks are good to keep your energy up, but also have first-aid uses, such as if you come upon someone with asthma, and they don't have their inhaler with them, caffeine will help ease the distress caused by the asthma:





In the largest compartment of the pack, I carry a poncho, extra zip ties, an emergency blanket, a casualty blanket, another large emergency blanket, spark-proof utility tool, work gloves, more nitrile gloves, an extra SWAT-T tourniquet, bandana, and 50 feet of 550 paracord:



These two packs are what I would have with me at all times, especially in a search and rescue situation. But again, the beauty of going "modular" is that you can take off part of your gear, and only carry what is needed at that particular time:



The waist pack is used exclusively for carrying first-aid and medical supplies. I took a standard first-aid kit, and added to it some Quik-Clot, a SWAT-T tourniquet, Israeli Bandages, and some liquid glucose - good to have if you encounter a diabetic who is in distress, and needs to have sugar quickly:



Notice more water containers. You need water for yourself to stay hydrated. But it is also helpful to have water in a pour-able container for irrigating wounds. The reason I mention that is that some team members will carry all their water in a Camel-Back container. Good for keeping hydrated, but hard to use in a situation where you need to pour water on a wound or to flush out eyes. But remember - water weighs about 8-pounds per gallon. Carrying too much will weigh you down!



Last but not least - the large pack. This is my "basecamp in a bag." I keep things that I do not need to have with me all the time, but that I will definitely need at some point. Extra clothes, freeze-dried meals, MREs, extra consumables (such as first-aid equipment , glow sticks, N95 masks, etc), hygiene supplies (foot powder, soap, hand sanitizer, toothbrush, etc). Oh, and **EXTRA SOCKS!** After being on your feet all day, a change of socks will be quite possibly the most regenerative thing you can do for yourself. I was on an all-day land navigation training event one time - after 8 hours of hiking through mountainous terrain, a change of socks was a life saver! This bag will probably be big and heavy. But then again, you won't be carrying it around with you all day. This one just provides a "container" for all this stuff, and can probably be left in your vehicle while you're out doing other CERT duties:



Drop leg pouches also make a nice addition to a modular equipment design. The pouch on the left is a Condor Drop Leg Dump Pouch. It is a fairly large pouch with a single compartment. It comes configured for left leg wear, but the leg strap is reversible for wearing on the right leg. This one makes a nice pouch for keeping things that you need quickly, such as gloves, bandanas, masks, snacks, or other items that you need to stow for a few moments, then retrieve again quickly. The pouch on the right has two main compartments and two magazine pouches. I can use the magazine pouches for a flashlight and a knife. The largest of the two main compartments is the perfect size for my Firefield Tracker 1x24 Night Vision Goggle Binoculars. In the smaller main pouch on the front, I keep my laser range finders. This is a VooDoo Tactical pouch that in and of itself is not a drop-leg pouch. But it has MOLLE attachments, and easily attaches to a VooDoo Tactical 20-0129001000 Mesh Drop Leg Platform:



This is the original issue CERT vest I received when I first went through training. It is extremely flimsy, does not have very many sturdy pockets or gear attach points, and quite frankly smells like formaldehyde! Many of the students complained about the vests. The newer issue vests are much improved, but still could be better.



This is my new CERT vest. There are many available on Amazon for very reasonable prices. This vest has many more pockets and gear attach points, a credential holder, the weave is much tighter and thicker, and it doesn't smell.





Additional things that I carry in my vehicle that are too large to put into any of these CERT bags:

- At least 7 gallons of water
- Sleeping bag
- Additional "Go Bags" with other survival equipment, such as heat sources, additional food, etc
- Tents and sleeping cots
- Camping chairs

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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