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**OEM COMMISSIONER HOLDS GRADUATION CEREMONY IN PORT-AU-PRINCE HAITI FOR OVER 400 HAITIAN COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM VOLUNTEERS**

*Disaster Simulation Caps 10 Day Training Program for Haitian Community*

New York City Office of Emergency Management (OEM) Commissioner Joseph F. Bruno today joined Sean Penn, Executive Director of the JP / Haitian Relief Organization, Ken Mallette, Vice President of James Lee Witt Associates and Clinton Global Initiative (CGI), Paul Antoine Bien-Aime, Minister of the Interior, and Eric Overvest, Haiti County Director UN Disaster Preparedness in presiding over a graduation ceremony for 410 Haitian Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) volunteers. The new graduates have undergone a 10 day training regiment in fire safety, first aid, triage, light search and rescue, public health, water safety, and disaster psychology.

“I could not be more pleased with the level of enthusiasm and amount of training completed in just 10 days,” said Commissioner Bruno. “The determination shown by these new Haitian Community Emergency Response Team volunteers should be an example to everyone.”

“CERT plays an important role in the recovery of communities in times of crisis, and we are dedicated to providing this service to the citizens of Haiti in support of the work the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) in Haiti,” said James Lee Witt, Chief Executive Officer of Witt Associates. “We had initially volunteered our services prior to the January 12 earthquake, and the need of course was more evident after the earthquake, so we increased our commitment.”

The program in Haiti was taught to classes of 40-50 people with lessons based on the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) national CERT curriculum, but they have been modified to meet the needs of Haiti’s population. The roughly 400 Haitians who were trained live in temporary shelters at the Petionville Club, a former golf course that now houses more than 50,000 people displaced by the 7.0 magnitude earthquake that struck Port-au-Prince on January 12, 2010.

The multi-agency team deployed from New York City consists of four Haitian-Creole speaking FDNY firefighters, two FDNY EMS personnel, two Department of Health employees, three OEM staff members, a senior CERT instructor.

The concept of developing a CERT program in Haiti came after President William J. Clinton became the United Nations Special Envoy for Haiti in 2009. President Clinton and former FEMA Director James Lee Witt recommended the program to the Haitian government after traveling to the country on a series of fact-finding missions. After the earthquake in January, Witt's firm, James Lee Witt Associates, requested New York City CERT instructors lead the first classes in Haiti. After the first round of training, the curriculum will be evaluated by Haitian officials. The CERT members trained by New York City instructors will then help develop the program in other parts of the country.

The New York City CERT program started in 2003 with 106 volunteers. Today, the City has 56 CERT teams and more than 1,200 volunteers representing all five boroughs. CERT volunteers participate in an 11-week training program in disaster preparedness and basic emergency response skills taught by active and retired personnel from the Police and Fire Departments. After completing training that includes lessons in fire safety, search and rescue, and disaster medical operations, CERTs support their local communities by assisting City agencies that prepare for and respond to disasters. CERT volunteers also work to educate their communities about emergency preparedness through OEM's Ready New York campaign.

The CERT program is a collaborative effort between OEM and the New York City Police and Fire Departments. CERTs are now active in 46 of the City's 59 Community Boards. OEM hopes to install teams in every community board by December, 2009.

For more information about the CERT program, or if you are interested in becoming a CERT volunteer, call 311 or visit [www.nyc.gov/cert](http://www.nyc.gov/cert).

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