

Civilian Defense on the Home Front, 1942

Introduction

In the early days of World War II, air raids and other attacks on populated areas in Europe generated fears that similar attacks could happen in the United States. On May 20, 1941, more than six months before the United States entered the war, President Franklin Roosevelt set up the Office of Civilian Defense (OCD) to coordinate state and federal measures to protect civilians in a war-related emergency. The OCD organized the United States Citizens Defense Corps to recruit and train volunteers to perform essential tasks.

The insignia in the poster featured here, published in 1942, illustrate the numerous jobs assigned to civilian volunteers. Enrolled and trained volunteers displayed their insignia on arm bands and on uniforms or civilian dress. The OCD also published a handbook, *The United States Citizens Defense Corps*, to explain the duties and responsibilities of various positions:

Who Should Join.—All able-bodied, responsible persons in the community—men and women, housewives, laborers, business and professional people—for the mutual protection of all. Boys and girls, and elderly people too, have work to do. The program is broad; the tasks are many; the time is now! . . .

Qualifications for membership require enrollment, physical and mental aptitude, recognition of obligation to study duties, take required training courses, and subsequently attend periodical group practice.

Questions for Discussion

Read the introduction and study each of the images. Then apply your knowledge of American history to answer the following questions:

1. Describe some of the concerns that led President Roosevelt to establish the United States Citizens Defense Corps.
2. Some argue that the Citizens Defense Corps as well as other home front activities, such as scrap drives and Victory gardens, inspired in Americans a spirit of “we are all in this together.” Present an argument to support or oppose this theory.
3. Examine the pages in the handbook concerning the Drivers Corps, Messengers, Rescue Squads, and Emergency Food and Housing Corps, and then summarize for each:
 - Who would be recruited as a member?
 - What were the responsibilities of the job?
 - What training was necessary for participation?
 - How were these corps members expected to assist regular emergency personnel?

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Image



“Official Civilian Defense Insignia, United States Citizens Defense Corps,” US Office of Civilian Defense, 1942 (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09520.36)

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U. S. Citizens Defense Corps

Who Should Join.—All able-bodied, responsible persons in the community—men and women, housewives, laborers, business and professional people—for the mutual protection of all. Boys and girls, and elderly people too, have work to do. The program is broad; the tasks are many; the time is now!

For percentages of workers per thousand population..... See pages 3-28

How to Join.—All persons should visit and offer their services to the local “Civilian Defense Volunteer Office” or, if it has not yet been established, direct to the local Civilian Defense Council. If neither organization is available, patriotic residents should call upon their mayor and discuss the need for organization.

Qualifications for membership require enrollment, physical and mental aptitude, recognition of obligation to study duties, take required training courses, and subsequently attend periodical group practice..... See pages 3-28

Physical requirements..... See page 38

Schools and Training should be organized locally and all members of each group are expected to study and attend training courses..... See page 35

Recommended training pamphlets..... See pages 3-28

Sample certificate of training..... See page 36

Duties are numerous.—A separate group is assigned to each classification of duty.
See pages 3-28

Insignia have been designed to distinguish each group or branch. Arm bands and cloth and metal ornaments for uniforms or civilian dress are permitted only for enrolled workers who have satisfactorily *completed training courses*.

For descriptions of insignia..... See pages 29, 30, 31

For methods of purchase..... See page 32

Equipment varies according to duties of different groups; for suggestions see chart... Page 33

Coordination of Groups.—See chart of “Civilian Protection Organization for a Municipality”..... Page 34

Periodical combined group practice..... See page 37

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From *The United States Citizens Defense Corps*, handbook, US Office of Civilian Defense, 1942. (National Archives)

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Drivers Corps

Personnel.—Men and women—experienced drivers—good vision.

Percentages of Workers Necessary per 1,000 of Population—

Men	Women	Youths
	5	

Duties.—Persons willing to offer their cars as well as their own time are required. Women are often enrolled for this work. Organization by sectional groups, with a Coordinator of Transportation in control, is suggested. Cars and drivers are assigned by the Coordinator to First Aid Squads, Casualty Stations, Control and Message Centers, and to the Staff of the Local Defense Coordinator. Instruction in driving under blackout and other air raid conditions is necessary.

School and Training Courses Required—

Hours,	First Aid	Fire Defense	Gas Defense	General	Drill
	10	0	5	5	2

Periodical Group Practice.—Individual workers must be *trained* as above: Groups must be *organized*, groups must practice as *groups*. The Drivers Corps should meet at least twice a month if not called more often. *Hours*—2. *Periods*—bimonthly.

They should make emergency parking arrangements—securing trucks assigned to them, driving and parking in groups, etc.

Recommended Training Pamphlets.—“Blackouts,” “A Training Guide for Emergency Drivers,” “Handbook for Emergency Drivers,” “Protection Against Gas,” “Handbook of First Aid.”

Types of Insignia.—Arm bands, uniform sleeve insignia, collar and cap ornaments, and civilian-dress lapel button only.



DRIVERS CORPS

Restrictions for Wear.—Only enrolled workers who have satisfactorily completed training courses listed above and who have been properly designated as members of “Drivers Corps” may wear this insignia on uniforms, arm bands, civilian-dress lapel buttons or in any “official” manner.

This insignia is protected by U. S. Letters Patent D-129,808. See page 32 for methods of purchase.

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Messengers

Personnel.—Young women—boys and girls (15 to 21 years)—should be able to ride bicycle or motorcycle.

Percentages of Workers Necessary per 1,000 of Population—

Men	Women	Youths
1	1	6

Duties.—A reliable and efficient messenger group is vital to organization for civilian defense. Messengers are assigned to Air Raid Warden posts, to Control and Message Centers, to hospitals and First Aid posts, to fire stations, and police precincts. Under a rain of bombs, other communications may break down, but the messenger will somehow get the message through.

School and Training Courses Required—

Hours,	First Aid	Fire Defense	Gas Defense	General	Drill
	10	3	2	5	2

Periodical Group Practice.—Individual workers must be *trained*, groups must be *organized*, groups must practice as *groups*. This is particularly true of messengers. Messengers should practice assembling at call at different points—relaying messages—reporting verbal messages. Minimum messengers' practice should consist of—*Hours*—2. *Period*—Bimonthly.

Recommended Training Pamphlets.—“Protection Against Gas,” “Fire Protection,” “First Aid in Prevention and Treatment of Chemical Casualties,” “Blackouts.”

Types of Insignia.—Arm bands, uniform sleeve insignia, collar and cap ornaments, and civilian-dress lapel buttons.

Restrictions for Wear.—Only enrolled workers who have satisfactorily completed training courses listed above and who have been properly designated “Messengers” may wear this insignia on uniforms, arm bands, civilian-dress lapel buttons, or in any “official” manner.

This insignia is protected by U. S. Letters Patent D-129,806. See page 32 for methods of purchase.



MESSENGERS

From *The United States Citizens Defense Corps*, handbook, US Office of Civilian Defense, 1942. (National Archives)

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Rescue Squads

Personnel.—Men—husky, resourceful, fearless.

Percentages of Workers Necessary per 1,000 of Population—

Men	Women	Youths
2		

Duties.—Air attacks provide special problems. Such responsibilities fall upon the Public Works, Fire, and other appropriate municipal departments. Rescue Squads must be organized to supplement these organizations, to rescue persons trapped in debris, and to shut off broken gas, electric, and water lines. Each squad consists of about 10 men, equipped with suitable protective clothing and the necessary tools and equipment for shoring up, tunneling, and minor demolition work, and for rendering emergency first aid.

School and Training Courses Required—

	First Aid	Fire Defense	Gas Defense	General	Drill
Hours,	20	10	5	5	2

Periodical Group Practice.—Individual workers must be *trained*, groups must be *organized*, groups must practice as *groups*. Group Rescue Squad practice, including assembly at designated points with equipment, should be on the following minimum schedule: *Hours*—2. *Periods*—Weekly.

Recommended Training Pamphlets.—“A Training Course for Rescue Squads,” “A Handbook for Rescue Squads,” “Fire Protection,” “Protection Against Gas,” “Handbook of First Aid.”

Types of Insignia.—Arm bands, uniform sleeve insignia, collar and cap ornaments, and civilian-dress lapel buttons only.

Restrictions for Wear.—Only enrolled workers who have satisfactorily completed training courses listed above and who have been properly designated as members of “Rescue Squads” may wear this insigne on uniforms, arm bands, civilian-dress lapel buttons, or in any “official” manner.

This insigne is protected by U. S. Letters Patent D-129,800. See page 32 for methods of purchase.



RESCUE SQUAD

From *The United States Citizens Defense Corps*, handbook, US Office of Civilian Defense, 1942. (National Archives)

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Emergency Food and Housing Corps

Personnel.—Men and women—strong, capable, long hours, sympathetic.

Percentages of Workers Necessary per 1,000 of Population—

Men	Women	Youths
	1	

Duties.—Food and shelter must be provided for those whose homes have been damaged or destroyed by air raid or other disaster. Usually the Welfare Department has general responsibility for coordinating such emergency services. It is assisted by enrolled personnel and private organizations equipped to render assistance.

School and Training Courses Required—

	First Aid	Fire Defense	Gas Defense	General	Drill
Hours,	10	0	3	5	20

Periodical Group Practice.—Individual workers must be *trained*, groups must be *organized*, groups must practice as *groups*. Emergency Food and Housing Corps require concentrated practice until proficient as teams of menu planners, purchasers, cooks, driers, washers, etc.

Minimum time should be—*Hours*—3. *Period*—Bimonthly.

Recommended Training Pamphlets.—“First Aid in Prevention and Treatment of Chemical Casualties,” “Protection Against Gas,” “Red Cross Canteen Course.”

Types of Insignia.—Arm bands, uniform sleeve insignia, collar and cap ornaments, and civilian-dress lapel buttons only.

Restrictions for Wear.—Only enrolled workers who have satisfactorily completed training courses listed above and who have been properly designated as members of “Emergency Food and Housing Corps” may wear this insignia on uniforms, arm bands, civilian-dress lapel buttons, or in any “official” manner.

This insignia is protected by U. S. Letters Patent D-129,809.
See page 32 for methods of purchase.



EMERGENCY FOOD AND HOUSING

From *The United States Citizens Defense Corps*, handbook, US Office of Civilian Defense, 1942. (National Archives)