
UNIT 6: CERT ORGANIZATION

In this unit you will learn about:

- **CERT Organization:** How to organize and deploy CERT resources according to CERT organizational principles.
- **Rescuer Safety:** How to protect your own safety and your buddy's during search and rescue.

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INTRODUCTION AND UNIT OVERVIEW

UNIT OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Describe the CERT structure.
- Identify how CERTs interrelate with the Incident Command System (ICS).
- Explain documentation requirements.

UNIT TOPICS

This unit will provide you with a thorough understanding of CERT organization and policy.

- CERT Organization
- CERT Mobilization
- Documentation

Effective CERT operations, like all aspects of emergency response, rely on effective communication.

CERT ORGANIZATION

PRINCIPLES OF ONSCENE MANAGEMENT

Onscene management in a disaster situation has three primary goals:

- Maintain the safety of disaster workers. The CERT Incident Commander/Team Leader (IC/TL) must continually prioritize response activities based on the team's capability and training and the principle that rescuer safety is the number one concern. CERT functional leadership assigns activities and accounts for team members. CERT members work in the buddy system and respond based on their sizeup of the situations that they encounter.
- Provide clear leadership and organizational structure by developing a chain of command and roles that are known by all team members. Each CERT member has only one person that he or she takes direction from and responds to.
- Improve the effectiveness of rescue efforts. Disaster information is collected and responses are prioritized based on rescuer safety and doing the greatest good for the greatest number according to the team's capabilities and training.

CERT organization is based on the Incident Command System (ICS), which is a proven management system used by emergency responders.

CERT ONSCENE MANAGEMENT

The specific CERT organizational structure and protocols provide:

- A well-defined management structure (e.g., leadership, functional areas, reporting chain, working in teams)
- A manageable span of control that provides for a desirable rescuer-to-supervisor ratio of between three and seven rescuers per supervisor
- Common terminology that contributes to effective communication and shared understanding
- Effective communication among team members and with professional responders, including the use of radios

CERT ORGANIZATION (CONTINUED)

- Consolidated action plans that coordinate strategic goals, tactical objectives, and support activities
- Comprehensive resource management that facilitates application of available resources to the incident in a timely manner
- Accountability

OBJECTIVES FOR CERT ONSCENE MANAGEMENT

In a disaster situation, the CERT:

- Identifies the scope of the incident (What is the problem?)
- Determines an overall strategy (What can we do, and how will we do it?)
- Deploys teams and resources (Who is going to do what?)
- Documents actions and results

THE NEED FOR FLEXIBILITY

Disasters create a dynamic, ever-changing environment. The CERT organizational framework is flexible so that it can expand or contract depending on the ongoing assessment priorities determined by the CERT Incident Commander/Team Leader (IC/TL), and people and resources available. This expansion and contraction helps ensure:

- Rescuer safety
- Doing the greatest good for the greatest number
- A manageable span of control
- Accountability of CERT members

CERT ORGANIZATION (CONTINUED)

INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM

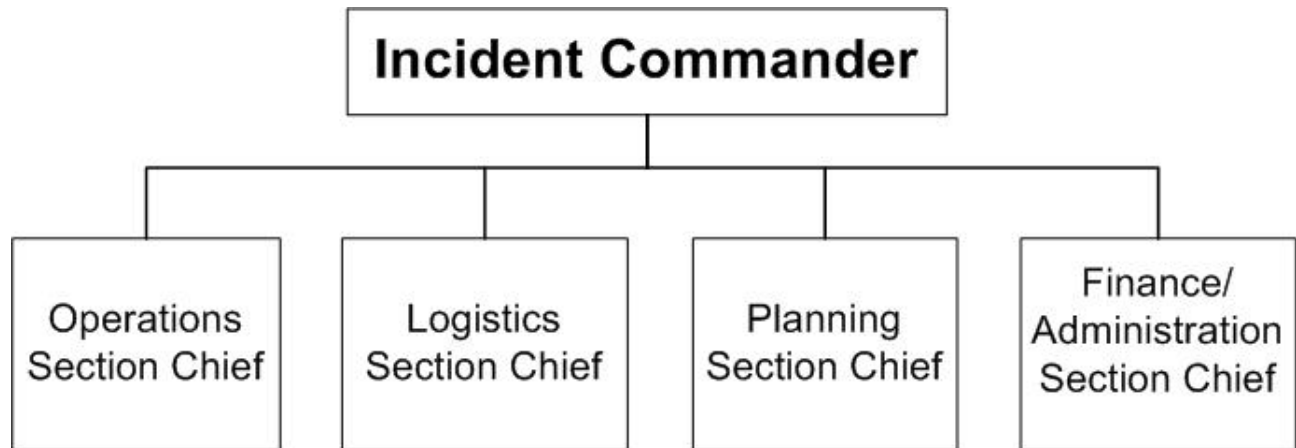
The Incident Command System (ICS) is the system used by emergency response agencies to manage emergency operations. When CERTs activate, they become part of that system.

Basic ICS structure for CERT is established by the person who arrives first on the scene. This person becomes the Incident Commander/Team Leader (IC/TL). Initially, the IC/TL may handle all of the command positions of ICS but, as the incident evolves, he or she may assign personnel as needed to the four ICS Command Functions:

- Operations Section Chief
- Logistics Section Chief
- Planning Section Chief
- Finance/Administration Section Chief

Through an effective ICS, all CERT members report through a chain of command to the IC/TL. The IC/TL reports to the first fire or law enforcement official at their location and takes direction from that person until otherwise directed or until the CERT is relieved.

ICS COMMAND FUNCTION ORGANIZATION CHART



CERT ORGANIZATION (CONTINUED)

Although there are a number of detailed responsibilities under each ICS function, the system itself is straightforward. CERTs will typically require the Operations, Planning, and Logistics functions. The CERT Incident Commander/Team Leader (IC/TL) is responsible for handling or delegating each function.

As the incident expands, CERT members are assigned or re-assigned to each section to handle specific aspects of the response while maintaining an effective span of control.

CERT Incident Commander/Team Leader

- Provides overall leadership for incident response
- Ensures incident safety
- Establishes incident objectives
- Is responsible for all functions until delegated
- Delegates authority to others
- Provides information to internal and external parties
- Establishes and maintains liaison with other responders (e.g., fire, law enforcement, public works, other CERTs)
- Takes direction from agency official

Operations Section

- Directs and coordinates all incident tactical operations
- Is typically one of the first functions to be assigned

CERT ORGANIZATION (CONTINUED)

Planning Section

- Tracks resource status (e. g., number of CERT members who have “reported for duty”)
- Tracks situation status
- Prepares the Team’s action plan
- Develops alternative strategies
- Provides documentation services

Logistics Section

- Provides communications
- Provides food and medical support to Team members
- Manages supplies and facilities

Finance and Administration Section

- Contract negotiation and monitoring
- Timekeeping
- Cost analysis
- Compensation for injury or damage to property

Finance and Administration is a function in the formal Incident Command System; however, CERTs will have very limited need, if any, for this function.

CERT ORGANIZATION (CONTINUED)

CERT OPERATIONS

Based on the principles of ICS, CERTs follow these protocols:

- Each CERT must establish a command structure.
- The CERT Incident Commander/Team Leader (IC/TL) directs team activities. During activation for a disaster, the first person at a predesignated staging area assumes this responsibility. The initial IC/TL may hand off this role to a predesignated leader when that person arrives.
- The location established by the CERT IC/TL as the central point for command and control of the incident is called the Command Post for the CERT. The IC/TL stays in the Command Post. If the IC/TL has to leave, the responsibility of IC/TL must be delegated to someone in the Command Post.

Using the ICS structure, CERT members are assigned to assist with a range of functions:

- Logistics — managing resources, services, and supplies
- Planning/Intelligence — collecting and displaying information; collecting and compiling documentation
- Operations — conducting fire suppression, medical operations, search and rescue

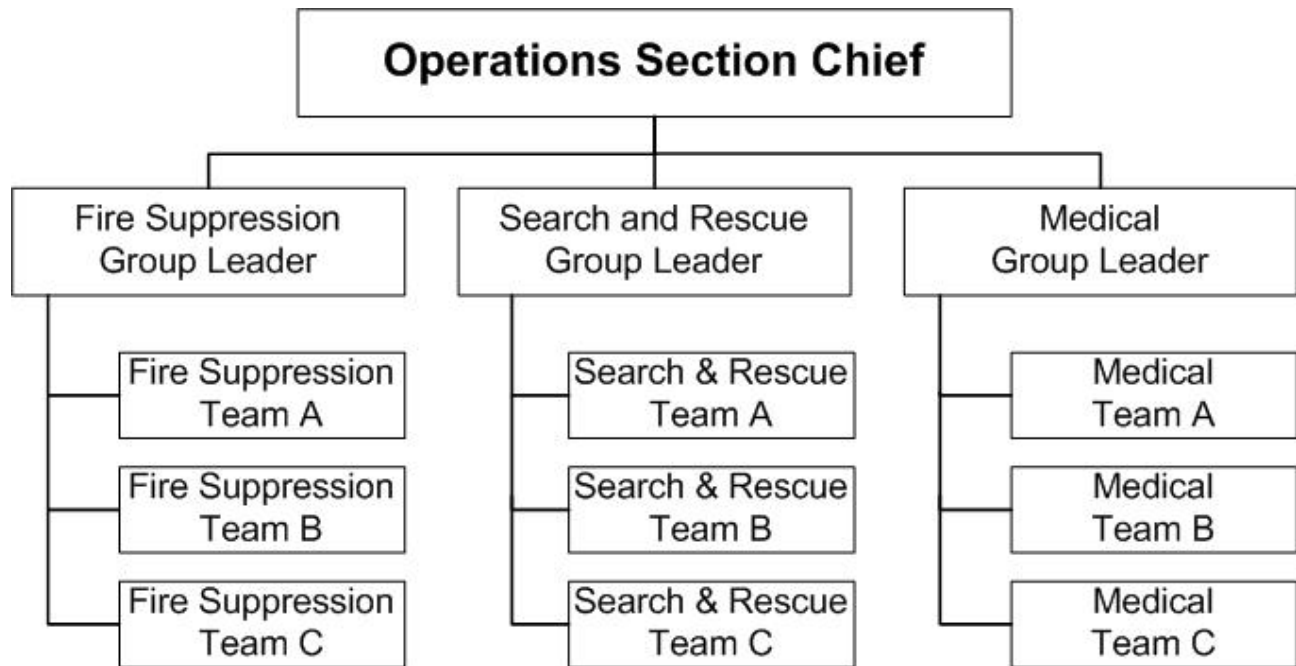
In all situations, each unit assigned must have an identified leader to supervise tasks being performed, to account for team members, and to report information to his or her designated leader.

In all situations, a manageable span of control is three to seven team members reporting to their designated leader.

CERT personnel assigned to Operations should always be assigned to teams consisting of at least three to four persons:

- One person will serve as runner and communicate with the Command Post.
- Two people will “buddy up” to respond to the immediate needs.
- Search and rescue teams must include at least four people, with a safety person remaining outside the area to be searched and at least two people to conduct the search.

EXPANDED CERT OPERATIONS STRUCTURE



CERT operations section structure, showing the Operations Section Chief at the top and the three Group Leaders underneath

CERT ORGANIZATION (CONTINUED)

DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

CERT members should refer any media inquiries to the CERT IC/TL. The IC/TL should then refer the media inquiries to the Public Information Officer of the CERTs' sponsoring organization.

If the Public Information Officer of the sponsoring organization refers media to the CERT IC/TL or otherwise authorizes them to speak with the media, the IC/TL should:

- Refrain from addressing the media until doing so will no longer inhibit or delay the team's ability to do the greatest good for the greatest number in the shortest amount of time
- Establish an area for briefing the media if necessary
- Be careful about the information he or she releases, making sure it is both accurate and approved for release, while also keeping in mind victims' right to privacy
- Not feel compelled to answer every question asked

NIMS COMPLIANCE

The Incident Command System is part of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). NIMS provides a consistent, comprehensive approach to incident management. It applies at all jurisdictional levels and across all emergency management functions and types of incidents.

NIMS was established so that first responders, including CERT members, from different jurisdictions and disciplines can work together better to respond to disasters and emergencies.

- To meet NIMS standards, CERT members must complete both the IS-100.a (*Introduction to Incident Command System*) and IS-700.b (*Introduction to National Incident Management System [NIMS]*) courses.
- Both independent study courses are available online from FEMA at <http://training.fema.gov/IS/NIMS.asp>.

CERT MOBILIZATION

The following steps describe how CERTs mobilize when an incident occurs. Immediately following the incident, CERT members take care of themselves, their families, their homes, and their neighbors.

- If the standard operating procedure (SOP) calls for self-activation, CERT members proceed to the predesignated staging area with their disaster supplies. Along the way, they make damage assessments that would be helpful for the CERT IC/TL's decision-making.
- The first CERT member at the staging area becomes the initial IC/TL for the response. As other CERT members arrive, the CERT IC/TL may pass leadership to someone else. The CERT IC/TL establishes operations to ensure effective communication, to maintain span of control, to maintain accountability, and to do the greatest good for the greatest number without placing CERT members in harm's way.
- One of the CERT IC/TL's first decisions will be to locate the team's Command Post. The staging area may become the Command Post; however, if another location would be safer or otherwise better, the Command Post should be set up there.
- As intelligence is collected and assessed, the IC/TL must prioritize actions and work with the Section Chiefs or leaders. The CERT organization is flexible and evolves based on new information.

Following an incident, information — and, therefore, priorities — may be changing rapidly. Communication between the CERT IC/TL and response teams ensures that CERTs do not overextend their resources or supplies.

RESCUER SAFETY

Effective emergency scene management requires the formulation and communication of strategic goals and tactical objectives to do the most good for the greatest number while maintaining the safety of rescue personnel.

COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

UNIT 6: CERT ORGANIZATION

CERT MOBILIZATION (CONTINUED)

Remember that rescuer safety is paramount. The first question to ask is, “Is it safe for the CERT members to attempt the rescue?” The answer to this question is based mainly on the degree of damage:

- If the damage is heavy: No rescue should be attempted. Use tape around the area or mark the area as heavy damage. CERT members do not have any legal authority to stop or restrict someone who wants to enter an area. At best, CERT members can warn others about the danger and inform the CERT IC/TL immediately if it is known that people are in the building.
- If the damage is moderate: Locate, triage (quickly evaluate, and treat Immediates for airway obstruction, bleeding, and shock), and immediately evacuate victims to a safe area while minimizing both the number of rescuers inside the building and the amount of time that they remain inside.
- If the damage is light: Locate, triage, continue sizeup, and document.

| CERT RESCUE EFFORTS BASED ON DEGREE OF DAMAGE | |
|--|---|
| Degree of Damage | Should Rescue Be Attempted? |
| HEAVY | No. Too dangerous to enter. Warn people to stay away. Inform the CERT Incident Commander/Team Leader (IC/TL) immediately if it is known that people are in the building. |
| MODERATE | Yes, but perform only quick and safe removals; limit onsite medical care to checking for breathing, stopping major bleeding, and treating for shock. Minimize the number of rescuers inside the building. |
| LIGHT | Yes. Locate, triage, continue sizeup, and document. |

COMMUNITY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

UNIT 6: CERT ORGANIZATION

CERT TASKS BASED ON DAMAGE LEVEL

Light Damage Site

| Fire | Search & Rescue | Medical (on site) | Medical (off site) |
|--|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Shut off utilities as needed- Extinguish small fires- Document | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Locate- Triage- Treat airway/major bleeding- Continue sizeup- Document | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Triage again- Move to treatment area- Head-to-toe assessment- Treatment- Facilitate transport as needed- Document | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Triage again- Head-to-toe assessment- Treatment- Facilitate transport as needed- Document |

Moderate Damage Site

| Fire | Search & Rescue | Medical (nearby) | Medical (off site) |
|--|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Shut off utilities if safe- Extinguish small fires- Document | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Locate- Triage- Treat airway/major bleeding- Evacuate- Warn others- Continue sizeup- Document | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Triage again- Move to treatment area (nearby safe location)- Head-to-toe assessment- Treatment- Facilitate transport as needed- Document | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Triage again- Head-to-toe assessment- Treatment- Facilitate transport as needed- Document |

Heavy Damage Site

| Fire | Exterior Search & Rescue Only |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Shut off utilities if safe- Document | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mark area for heavy damage- Warn others- Gather information- Inform CERT IC/TL immediately- Document |

Tasks required of Fire, Search and Rescue, Medical, and Treatment Area teams based on the degree of damage to the structure.