
The Basis for CERT Participation

The Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) describes how the community will prepare for, respond to, and recover from an emergency or disaster. The EOP:

- Establishes emergency management and emergency response organizations using the Incident Command System, and assigns responsibility for key positions.
- Establishes lines of authority and coordination among community departments, agencies, and organizations.
- Describes how protection will be provided for people and property.
- Identifies available response resources.

CERTs are part of the response organization outlined in the EOP.

Incident Command System

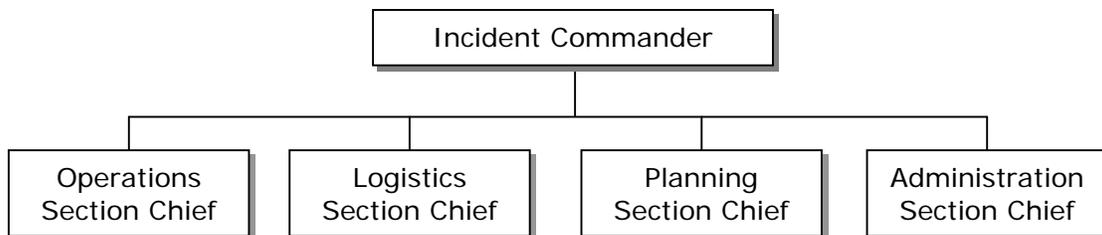
To understand the CERT organization, it is helpful to know a little about the **Incident Command System (ICS)**. ICS is the system used by professional responders to manage and respond to emergencies and disasters.

The basic ICS structure is established by the first person at the scene, who becomes the **Incident Commander (IC)**.

In a small incident, the IC may handle all duties—much like a police officer at a traffic accident. In larger events, the IC delegates responsibility for some duties to make the overall response more manageable.

ICS Expansion

The ICS structure is designed to be flexible, expanding and contracting with the needs of the incident. As needs and demands at the incident expand, the IC will assign people, called **Section Chiefs**, to help manage the incident. The Section Chiefs are shown in the chart below. As the incident expands further, tasks that need to be accomplished are assigned to one of the ICS Sections.



CERTs and ICS

When working in their neighborhoods or workplaces, CERTs use ICS to manage their activities.

Initially, all CERT members report to their neighborhood or workplace **staging area** (a predesignated assembly area) with their disaster supplies. Along the way, each team member records the locations and types of damage that they see. This information will be used to establish priorities and make decisions about whether and how CERTs will respond.

The CERT Team Leader

The first CERT member to arrive becomes the Incident Commander. He or she begins managing operations until the designated CERT **Team Leader** arrives.

When the Team Leader arrives at the staging area, he or she becomes responsible for managing CERT operations until relieved by the first professional responder on the scene.

The Team Leader:

- Ensures that information is continually gathered about injuries and damage.
 - Makes ICS position assignments.
 - Communicates and coordinates with professional responders.
 - Ensures that team operations are documented.
 - Prioritizes the CERT response to the incident—to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people.
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The Incident Command Post

The CERT Incident Command Post is located near the staging area. From this location the CERT Team Leader and Section Chiefs manage and direct CERT team activities.

If the Team Leader has to leave the Incident Command Post for any reason, he or she passes the responsibility for team operations to another CERT member who then becomes the Incident Commander.

Benefits of the CERT Structure

Establishing this organizational structure helps CERT Team Leaders to:

- Direct team resources to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people.
 - Ensure team safety by having an accountability system and management structure.
 - Communicate more effectively with fewer people.
 - Manage information more effectively.
 - Document CERT response activities.
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CERT Teams

CERTs may operate as a single team that performs all activities as required or, CERTs may be assigned to smaller teams.

The teams assigned will be based on incident needs. Typical team assignments include:

- Fire Suppression Teams.
 - Search and Rescue Teams.
 - Medical Teams.
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Team Makeup

If CERTs are assigned to smaller teams, each team must have:

- At least three members.
- A designated leader.

One team member serves as a runner and relays messages between the team and the Operations Section Chief at the Incident Command Post. The other two team members become a “buddy team” and respond to incidents as directed. The designated Team Leader is responsible for ensuring team safety, communicating with the Section Chief, and carrying out the assigned tasks.

CERT Mobilization

When an incident occurs, CERT members first take care of matters close to home. This includes handling any concerns related to:

- Themselves.
- Their families.
- Their homes.
- Their immediate neighbors.

Individuals will not be able to function effectively as CERT members until such concerns have been addressed.

Once matters in their immediate area have been resolved, CERT members function according to the standard operating procedures for their team.

Communication

Two-way communication between the CERT Team Leaders and CERT teams operating in the field is vital.

During the response, situations and priorities may change rapidly. CERT Team Leaders must be aware of these changes and must be able to communicate this changing information. Doing so helps to ensure that CERT members act safely and do the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

CERT Decisionmaking

Two-way communication between the CERT Team Leaders and the CERT teams operating in the field promotes good decisionmaking because both CERT Team Leaders and CERT teams will have the most current information about disaster events.

Because team safety is always the first priority, all decisions will be made with one key question in mind:

Is it safe for CERT members to attempt this task?

CERT Documentation

CERTs also play an important role in incident documentation. Efficient flow of information is vital for:

- Deploying CERT teams to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people.
- Accounting for CERT members.
- Tracking injuries and damage.
- Developing an understanding of the overall situation.
- Providing documentation to responders when they arrive.

Standard forms are available for many types of CERT documentation.

Lesson Summary

- The Incident Command System is used to manage emergency operations.
 - CERTs use this system, which expands and contracts as needed to handle the situation.
 - Efficient two-way communication is essential for effective decisionmaking.
 - The CERT decisionmaking process is guided by the goal of CERT team safety.
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