

Module 1: Introduction to CERT

Lesson 3: CERT Organization

Self-Study Guide

Lesson Overview

Lesson Purpose This lesson explains how CERTs are organized and how they tie into the overall incident response organization.

Lesson Objectives After completing this lesson, you should be able to:

- Describe how the Incident Command System (ICS) applies to the CERT organization.
- Explain how CERT decisionmaking relates to rescuer safety.

Estimated Time 25 minutes

Contents This lesson includes the following sections:

- Lesson Overview
- The Incident Command System
- CERT Organization in a Disaster
- CERT Mobilization and Decisionmaking
- Lesson Summary

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 (ICS) 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.

Where Will You Fit Into the CERT Organization?

Below, three CERT members share their thoughts on how they fit into the CERT organization.

Sandy Bastille

“We had an unexpected storm that brought a high level of wind and wave activity to our community. And when we were activated, the water that was pouring into our community, it was just a phenomenal amount of water, and people were scurrying about trying to get out of the way of emergency equipment and get out of the way of the water and what have you. So we were really proactive in trying to coordinate and recognize and identify every person so that we knew everybody was safe; pull them back to high ground, and then we were able to man barricades and provide an avenue for people to be able to travel safely in the areas that weren't inundated with water. That also supported the public works department so that they could move their equipment about without fearing that they were going to run over a little child or an adult or someone that was walking. It also provided us the flexibility to be able to identify where people were and what were the actual danger spots and hot spots that we needed to get to immediately.”

Sara Trimble

“I've gotten into the disaster programs within the hospitals, both the one I work at and the one that's close by, and helping their disaster committees come up with plans, what to do should there be disasters, as well as providing communications support via the Ham frequencies.”

John Clark

“There's multiple parts in CERT and in our group we've all kind of gravitated to like a little special thing that we like to do. My specialty is, I'm an outdoor person, so I like to be outdoors. I kind of gravitate more toward the urban search and rescue, being out in kind of the front line, checking things out and providing that kind of information back to our CERT director so that we can get CERT teams out in the field if we need them.”

The Incident Command System

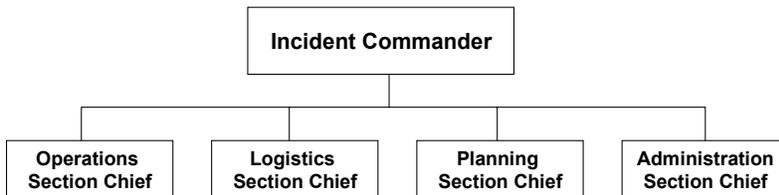
To understand the CERT organization, it is helpful to know a little about the Incident Command System (ICS). ICS is the system used by professional responders to manage and respond to emergencies and disasters.

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.



CERT Organizational Chart with the Incident Commander at the top. The Operations Section Chief, Logistics Section Chief, Planning Section Chief, and Administration Section Chief report to the Incident Commander.

Knowledge Review



Instructions: Select the correct answer. When you are finished, turn to the next page to check your answers.

1. The _____ describes how the community will respond in an emergency or disaster.
 - CERT Team Leader
 - Emergency Operations Plan
 - Operations Section Chief

2. The _____ is used to manage operations by agencies that have responsibilities for responding to emergencies or disasters.
 - Emergency Operations Center
 - Fire Safety Council
 - Incident Command System

3. An advantage of ICS is that:
 - It is flexible and expandable to match the needs of the emergency or disaster.
 - It has the same size and complexity no matter what the emergency or disaster situation.
 - After the organizational structure is set up, it does not change.

Knowledge Review: Answer Key



Instructions: Compare your answers to those shown below.

1. The _____ describes how the community will respond in an emergency or disaster.
- CERT Team Leader
 - Emergency Operations Plan**
 - Operations Section Chief

The **Emergency Operations Plan** describes how the community will prepare for, respond to, and recover from an emergency or disaster. The EOP assigns responsibilities for key positions, establishes lines of authority, describes how people and property will be protected, and identifies available response resources.

2. The _____ is used to manage operations by agencies that have responsibilities for responding to emergencies or disasters.
- Emergency Operations Center
 - Fire Safety Council
 - Incident Command System**

The **Incident Command System** is used to manage operations by agencies that are responsible for responding to emergencies or disasters. Using ICS makes the overall response to emergencies and disasters more manageable.

3. An advantage of ICS is that:
- It is flexible and expandable to match the needs of the emergency or disaster.**
 - It has the same size and complexity no matter what the emergency or disaster situation.
 - After the organizational structure is set up, it does not change.

An advantage of ICS is that **it is flexible and expandable to match the needs of the emergency or disaster.** The organization expands and contracts with the changing needs of the situation.

CERT Organization in a Disaster

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 most good for the most people.

The Incident Command Post

The **CERT Incident Command Post (ICP)** 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 ICP 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 most good for the most 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.

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.

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 ICP. 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.

Knowledge Review



Instructions: Select the correct answer. When you are finished, turn to the next page to check your answers.

1. CERTs take their on-scene direction from:
 - The Planning Chief.
 - The Team Leader.
 - The Emergency Manager.

2. As the needs of a disaster expand, the Team Leader may assign _____ to manage specific aspects of the response.
 - A Team Commander
 - An Assistant Team Leader
 - Section Chiefs

3. If CERTs are assigned to small teams, each team must include:
 - A designated leader.
 - The Section Chief.
 - The Incident Commander.

Knowledge Review: Answer Key



Instructions: Compare your answers to those shown below.

1. CERTs take their on-scene direction from:

- The Planning Chief.
- The Team Leader.**
- The Emergency Manager.

CERTs take their direction from the **Team Leader**, who functions as the Incident Commander until relieved by the first professional responder on the scene.

2. As the needs of a disaster expand, the Team Leader may assign _____ to manage specific aspects of the response.

- A Team Commander
- An Assistant Team Leader
- Section Chiefs**

As the needs of the disaster expand, the Team Leader may assign **Section Chiefs** to manage specific aspects of the response. The Section Chiefs that may be assigned include Operations, Planning, Logistics, and Administration.

3. If CERTs are assigned to small teams, each team must include:

- A designated leader.**
- The Section Chief.
- The Incident Commander.

If CERTs are assigned to small teams, each team must have a **designated leader**. This person 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 areas have been resolved, CERT members function according to the standard operating procedures for their teams.

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.

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 most good for the most 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.

Knowledge Review

Instructions: Select the correct answer. When you are finished, turn to the next page to check your answers.

1. Jean is a CERT volunteer. Spring storms have caused flash flooding and mudslides in the valley where she lives. The CERTs in her community are supposed to self-activate. Which of the following should Jean do first?
 - Report to the predesignated staging area
 - Go to the command post and ask whether they need help
 - Check her home and family

2. Who acts as the initial Incident Commander?
 - The ranking fire or law enforcement officer
 - The first CERT member who arrives at the staging area
 - The local president of CERT

3. _____ is critical to CERT decisionmaking.
 - Ongoing communication
 - Team assignments
 - Training in ICS

Knowledge Review: Answer Key



Instructions: Compare your answers to the correct ones shown below.

1. Jean is a CERT volunteer. Spring storms have caused flash flooding and mudslides in the valley where she lives. The CERTs in her community are supposed to self-activate. Which of the following should Jean do first?

- Report to the predesignated staging area
- Go to the command post and ask whether they need help
- Check her home and family**

Jean should **check her home and family** before proceeding to the staging area. She should also check on immediate neighbors to see if they need help.

2. Who acts as the initial Incident Commander?

- The ranking fire or law enforcement officer
- The first CERT member who arrives at the staging area**
- The local president of CERT

The first CERT member who arrives at the staging area acts as the CERT Incident Commander. As more people arrive, that person may pass on the leadership to the designated Incident Commander or to someone more qualified.

3. _____ is critical to CERT decisionmaking.

- Ongoing communication**
- Team assignments
- Training in ICS

Ongoing communication is critical to CERT decisionmaking because leaders need to have the most current information about the disaster. All decisions will be made with the following question in mind: Is it safe for CERT members to attempt this task?

Lesson Summary

Lesson Summary

In this lesson, you learned that:

- The ICS 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.

Next Lesson

You have completed this lesson. You are now ready to begin Lesson 4: CERT Sizeup.