

CERT ICS

But as the CERT concept grew around the Country, and teams became larger with a much expanded areas of responsibility, the original team organization model was no longer working.

CERT team shifted to the Incident Command System (ICS) model for team organization and there were two reasons for this shift, “span of control” and “separation of tasks”.

Span of Control:

Professional firefighters use the ICS when responding to large and small incident. One of the critical elements of ICS is span of control.

- They work in teams that have a span of control, usually:
- One officer for every three to five firefighters
- A battalion chief for every three to five teams.
 - The reason for this is that in an emergency situation five people is about the maximum number that can be kept track of with everything else that is going on, and sometimes even that’s a stretch.
 - If the incident that they are working at needs additional resources, more teams and battalion chiefs respond but always maintaining this span of control.
 - In very large incident, more layers of management personnel are incorporated into this structure, always maintaining this 3-5 level of control.

One of the major benefits of ICS is that it is flexible and expandable. The more people you need, the more you can add using the same span of control.

The current CERT team organization model does not follow this span of control. The CERT teams report to the CERT Team Leader. This will work if there are only four teams working, Logistics also reports to the CERT team leader making this five direct reports.

Most CERT programs across the Country are organized into neighborhood or workplace teams. By definition, these teams are much larger and have a greater area of responsibility than just their local block.

- In a major disaster, there may be numerous ERT teams (fire, medical, search & rescue teams) working in the neighborhood or workplace.
- If there are 25 CERT teams working on life saving and life safety issues in the neighborhood or workplace, who will direct them and who will they report to?
- The CERT team leader? This makes for an overwhelming workload considering everything else the CERT team leader is responsible for.
- With ICS, the Operations Section is responsible for managing the ERT teams and can add layers of management to keep the span of control to 3-5.

ICS is built around the concept of separation of tasks.

- Tasks that have common elements are placed in one of the five ICS functions. Simply put, all tasks that involve supply and resources are placed in the Logistics Section.
- Tasks that involve direct response to incidents are placed in the Operational Section
- Tasks that involve gathering or sharing of information are placed in the Planning/Intelligence Section.
- Tasks that involve documentation are placed in the Administration/Finance Section.

This system is used in both emergency management and emergency response. Many CERT programs have incorporated this type of ICS task separation into their team organization, only changing the Administration/Finance Section to the Administration Section, which is responsible for documentation.

- The Logistics Section is part of the existing CERT team organization materials But the Planning/Intelligence, Operations and Administration Section are not. These functions are included in the CERT team leaders responsibilities or to someone they delegate the functions to
 - CERT programs have incorporated these other Sections into their team organization to eliminate overwhelming the CERT team leader. The Operations Section controls the ERT teams in the street. The more teams they have the more layers they add. Some CERT programs organize these layers geographically. Having Operations Branch team leaders for smaller grid areas of their neighborhood or workplace. Other programs use ERT team responsibilities, having Operations Branch team leaders for search & rescue, medical and fire teams. Some programs combine both to maintain a manageable span of control.
 - The Planning/Intelligence Section has been added to many CERT program because of the need to gather and disseminate accurate information. Usually these groups have maps of the neighborhood or workplace, portable radios to gather information and some type of display boards, like flip charts, to track and display the information they receive.
 - By adding a Planning/Intelligence Section, it frees up the CERT team leader to make decisions and prioritize incidents. It also helps with the span of control.

The Administration Section has been added by many programs to accurately record information. It's a central repository for all written CERT information. This Section can also provide scribes for the other Sections, recording actions of the CERT Sections and teams. The scribes information ends up in the Administration Section after it is no longer necessary.

Some of the people who take the CERT training do not have the physical skills to respond to incidents, but they have a desire to participate in disaster response with their team. By adding these other ICS Sections to the CERT team organization, many programs have found that it gives these people an important role in disaster response. Just makes sense.