

Model Community Emergency Response Team [CERT] Organization Chart and Training for Effective Operations

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Introduction

The tenth anniversary of the Hurricane Katrina disaster reminds Americans of the need for citizen volunteer training, preparation and organization for effective response to natural and man-made disasters. The people of New Orleans and surrounding areas clearly lacked the ability to cope with the situation without government assistance. Many simply waited for government rescue without taking community survival initiatives. People died waiting.

Now with the always present threat of natural disasters, coupled with war time threats of Islamist or other terrorist groups' attacks on the homeland, the need for local community emergency response organizations has never been greater.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency, [FEMA] within the Department of Homeland Security, recommends the creation of local Community Emergency Response Teams [CERT] in a nationwide effort to make communities better prepared and more resilient when disasters occur.

Unfortunately not all communities participate in this effort. Some local and county government elected officials and emergency response employees are reluctant or even opposed to citizen initiatives to create CERTS due to an apparent belief that disaster operations are solely the responsibility of government agencies.

All local and county elected officials should enthusiastically support CERT creation. Even over the hesitancy of their emergency management staff.

Following are recommendation for CERT organization and training. These model recommendations are similar but not identical FEMA recommendations and are designed for more effective and efficient operations, based on the author's experiences.

Organization

Attached is a recommended CERT Organization Chart.

The CERT leader should be a qualified citizen volunteers Incident Commander. The leader could be appointed by the local emergency management agency [EMA] director to insure a cooperative and supportive relationship, but should not be an EMA or other government emergency response agency employee. That would be counterproductive to the CERT's mission of providing effective temporary neighborhood and community emergency response when no governmental assistance is available.

One or more deputy commanders should be included in the organizational structure to provide relief time for the commander or to supply leadership if the commander is absent from the community or is a victim of the incident.

CERT Incident Commanders and deputies could serve as liaison officers if requested to participate in EMA command center activities during operations and recovery.

A CERT should be divided into two sections: Support Section and Operations Section. Each led by a section chief assisted by a deputy.

The support section is responsible for all planning, logistics and administration functions. Included in this section are financing, legal, information management, training, documentation, communications and other support functions. Support functions are led by unit leaders.

The Operations Section conducts disaster response operations through search and rescue, fire suppression and medical treatment activities.

The basic disaster response unit is strike team composed of four CERT members led by a strike team leader. Search and rescue, fire suppression and medical strike teams are assembled into task forces led by a task force leader. A task force may also contain any mix of multiple strike teams depending on the situation. The number of volunteers determines the potential number of strike teams and task forces.

CERTs should consider following the practice of citizen volunteer emergency groups in British Commonwealth countries and identify leaders by rank insignia or other device placed on arm bands, vests, hats or other articles of clothing. This allows CERT members, government responders and the general public to quickly identify CERT leaders.

A suggested method of selecting commanders and leaders is shown in the second attachment.

Training

Training is critical to the successful operation of a CERT. The recommended minimum training requirements for CERT members and leaders is outlined in the third attachment. Training can be obtained on line from the National CERT Program, Federal Emergency Management Agency of the Department of Homeland Security. Trained CERT members could also furnish local class room training to other members.

Specialist volunteering for the Support Section should have background education and experience in their specialty field in addition to basic CERT training. Medical strike team volunteers should have training and experience in triage and emergency medical treatment in addition to CERT training.

Comments are welcomed either through the Applied Government Studies Center [www.agscenter.org] or directly to the author [charles@agscenter.org]

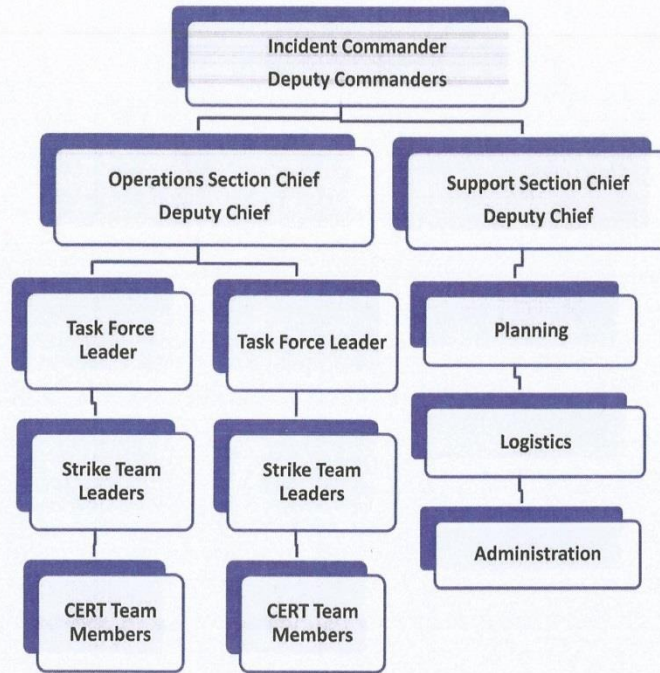
Attachments

CERT Organization Chart

CERT Leaders Selection

CERT Minimum Training Requirements

CERT Organization Chart



Insignia (Optional)

Strike Team Leader	2 Chevrons
Task Force Leader	3 Chevrons
Deputy Section Chief	1 Bar
Section Chief	2 Bars
Deputy Commander	Oak Leaf
Commander	Eagle

CERT Leaders Selection

Position

Incident Commander

Deputy Incident Commanders

Section Chiefs

Deputy Section Chiefs

Task Force Leaders

Strike Team Leaders

Support Unit Leaders

Selected By

EMA Director

Incident Commander

Incident Commander

Incident Commander

Operations Section Chief

Operations Section Chief

Support Section Chief

CERT

Minimum Training Requirements

1.0 Operations Section

1.1 CERT Team Member:

1. IS-317 Introduction to Community Emergency Response Team
2. CERT Basic Training Course

1.2 Strike Team Leader

1. Above Training

1.3 Task Force Leader

1. Above Training
2. IS – 7 A Citizens Guide to Disaster Assistance

1.4 Deputy Section Chief

1. Above Training
2. ICS-100 Introduction to Incident Command System
3. IS-120 An Orientation to Community Disaster Exercises

1.5 Section Chief

1. Above Training
2. IS-001 Emergency Program Manager and Orientation to the Position

1.6 Deputy Incident Commander

1. Above Training
2. Incident Command Exercise Completion

1.7 Incident Commander

1. Above Training
2. Incident Command Experience

Note: Equivalent Training may be substituted for any above training courses.

2.0 Support Section

2.1 Specialist

1. IS-317 Introduction to Community Emergency Response
2. Demonstrated Training and Experience in Specialty Field

2.2 Unit Leader

1. Above Training
2. IS-7 A Citizens Guide to Disaster Assistance

2.3 Deputy Section Chief

1. Same as Operation Deputy Section Chief
2. Demonstrated Management Training or Experience

2.4 Section Chief

1. Same as Operations Section Chief
2. Demonstrated Management Training or Experience

