

2021

ICS TIPS AND TECHNIQUES



DIVISIONS AND GROUPS

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Cover picture - Divisions and Branches for the Rocky Fire in California. The Chronicle, August 2015

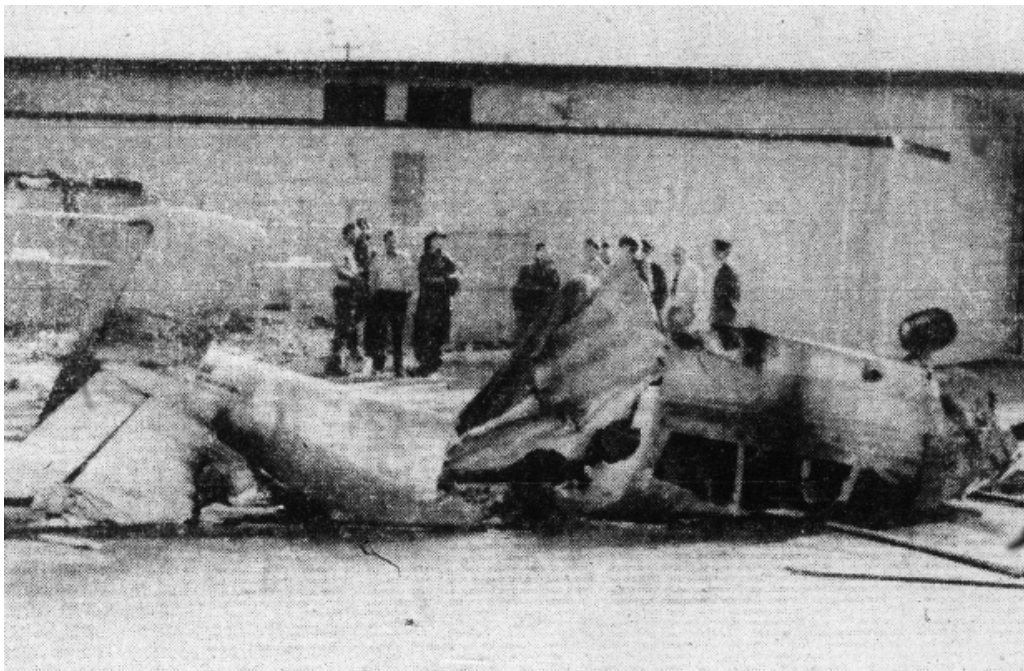
INTRODUCTION

This is a simplification of Divisions and Groups to make it easier to understand and teach the concepts of Divisions and Groups to an ICS 200 or 300 class. As well, this illustrates why Divisions and Groups are at the same level on the organization chart rather than one being above the other.

Writing this out may make this look quite complicated but in the classroom, I generally draw the diagram on the summary page and explain it – taking about 10 minutes. That usually gives the students the general idea, but as an instructor you will want to have a full understanding of this.

We will stay away from worrying about Strike Teams, Task Forces, and Single Resources and Branches aside from a generalization that those would be done by the Supervisors and an observation that “Whatever resources were assigned to the Objective, they are ample to accomplish the Objective within the stated time.”

I am grateful to Kevin A. Hakes of the Hinton Training Centre (Alberta Wildfire) for inviting me to co-teach courses. It was working with the wildfire staff (who are used to working with Divisions) that led me to understand why emergency management uses Groups, wildfire uses Divisions, and they are both essentially the same thing. By teaching with others, we learn more ourselves.



May 3, 1976 Small plane crashes after take-off at Edmonton Municipal Airport – Edmonton Journal. The Fairwinds Airport map in the scenario looks amazingly similar to the City of Edmonton map and the actual location of this incident!

THE SCENARIO AND OBJECTIVES

We'll use the ICS Canada I-300 Module 3 scenario of a plane crash with three separate "sites" for the same incident.

A small plane crash scenario is presented with three locations; a highway where several cars have been struck, a parking lot with about 20 cars on fire, and an office building with structural damage, fire and casualties. We will label consider these three separate sites within the same incident and refer to them as "Highway", "Parking Lot/Parking", and "Office Building/Office".

The priorities do not change whether you use Divisions or Groups. The problems will still be people are hurt and/or trapped, there are fires, victims need medical care, and there is a need to secure the scene. Those become the Objectives – we will use the following four Objectives for this exercise:

1. Rescue all people trapped in vehicles or in the office building by (time)
2. Extinguish or control all fires at the three locations by (time).
3. Provide medical triage, treatment, and transport for all victims by (time).
4. Establish a perimeter for safety and investigative needs around all three sites by (time).

For the purposes of this example, to accomplish these objectives, we will require the following resources (with appropriate crews) for the specified Objective:

1. 2 Rescue, 1 Ladder, 1 Engine
2. 2 Ladder, 9 Engines
3. 7 Basic Life Support Ambulances (BLS) and 1 Advanced Life Support (ALS)
4. 12 marked police Units

ORGANIZED BY GROUP

ORGANIZATION BY GROUPS

Generally, Emergency Management tends to organize in terms of the services; police do police things, fire deals with fire and rescue, and EMS takes care of the patients. This is organization by function and the incident is organized into Groups. A Group has one Objective and adequate resources are assigned to accomplish the Objective in the stated time.

	Highway	Parking Lot	Office
Rescue Obj #1	1 Rescue 1 Ladder		
Fire Suppression Obj #2	4 Engines	2 Engines	5 Engines 1 Ladder
Treatment Obj #3	2 BLS	1 BLS	3 BLS 1 ALS
Perimeter Obj #4	3 Units	2 Units	7 Units

ORGANIZATION BY DIVISION

It may not be possible for the resources to move easily from one location to another. The highway is walled off with sound barriers, the fires prevent easy access from the resources at the office building. It may be better to organize around three separate sites. This is organization by geography and the incident is organized into Divisions, using the exact same number of resources as before, but now each Division has resources assigned for multiple Objectives. Note that the exact same number of resources are assigned to accomplish the Objective, but they are now reporting to a Division Supervisor.

ORGANIZED BY DIVISION

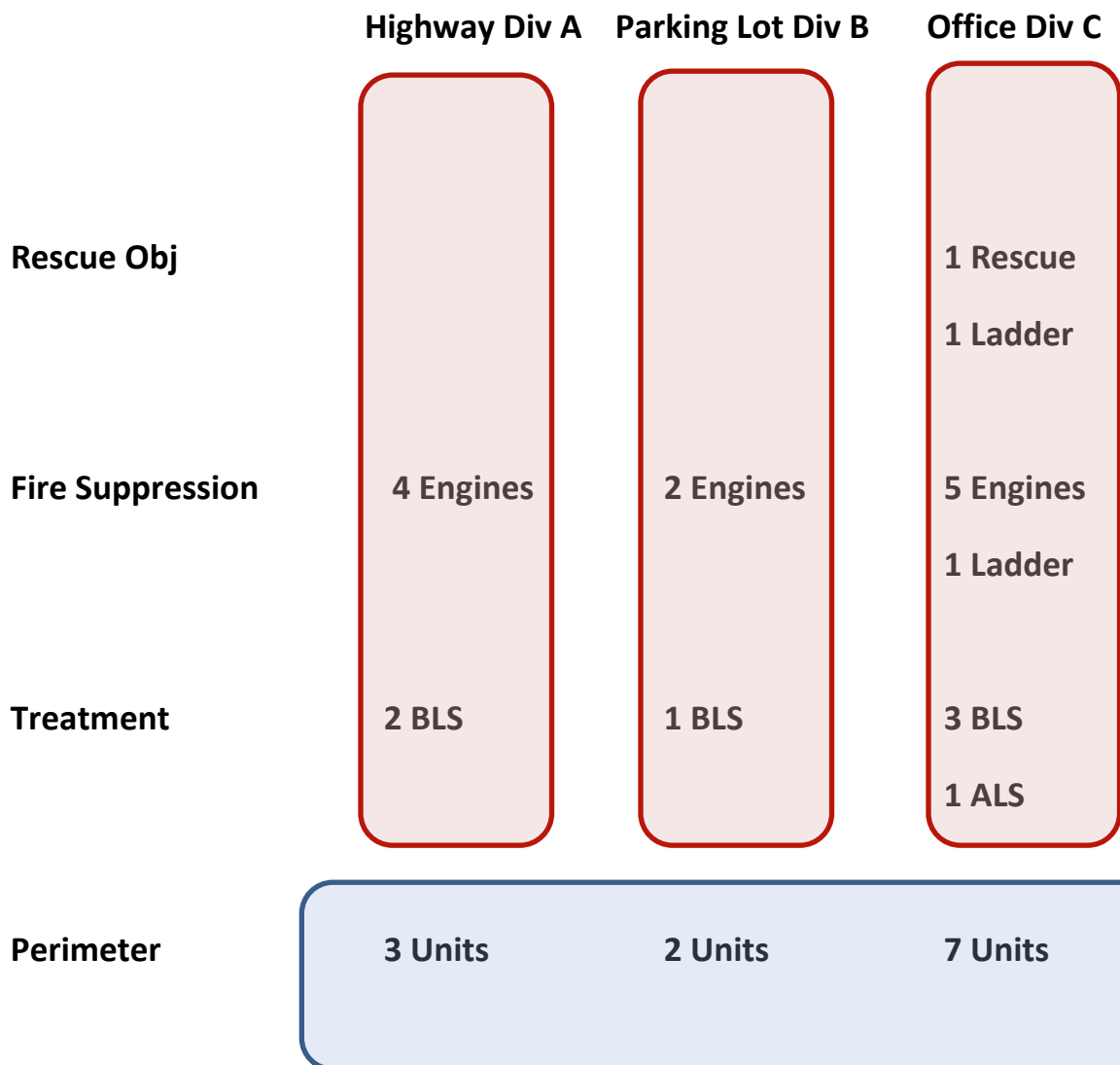
	Highway Div A	Parking Lot Div B	Office Div C
Rescue			1 Rescue 1 Ladder
Fire Suppression	4 Engines	2 Engines	5 Engines 1 Ladder
Treatment	2 BLS	1 BLS	3 BLS 1 ALS
Perimeter	3 Units	2 Units	7 Units

ORGANIZATION BY DIVISION AND GROUP

While it may not be possible for the resources to move easily from one location to another, the resources doing the perimeter can move easily because they are away from the fires and only have a few key locations which shut down the entire site. They will organize by function, but the rest is organized by the geographic location. This ICS organization will use both Divisions and Groups, with the exact same number of resources as before.

ORGANIZED BY DIVISION

ORGANIZED BY GROUP



MASTER CHART FOR TEACHING DIVISIONS AND GROUPS

1. Everything is organized by the objectives (Rescue, Fire Suppression, Treatment, Perimeter)
2. Each of the Objectives requires sufficient Resources to get the entire Objective done, regardless of how they are organized. Sufficient resources will be assigned for each Objective.
3. The Incident Command/Operations/Planning will determine whether the most effective organization will be done by function or geographically, or a combination of Groups/Divisions.
4. Groups work on ONE Objective at all times. Divisions work on ONE (i.e. Perimeter) OR MORE Objectives (i.e. the Office Division may do rescue, suppression, and Treatment)
5. Whether you organize by Divisions or Groups or Mixed, you still need to have sufficient resources to accomplish the Objective and the resources must still go where they are needed. Each Division is not given an equal share of the Resources.
6. The Ops Chief will re-allocate resources depending on work load, whether Divs/Groups/Mixed.

ORGANIZED BY DIVISION

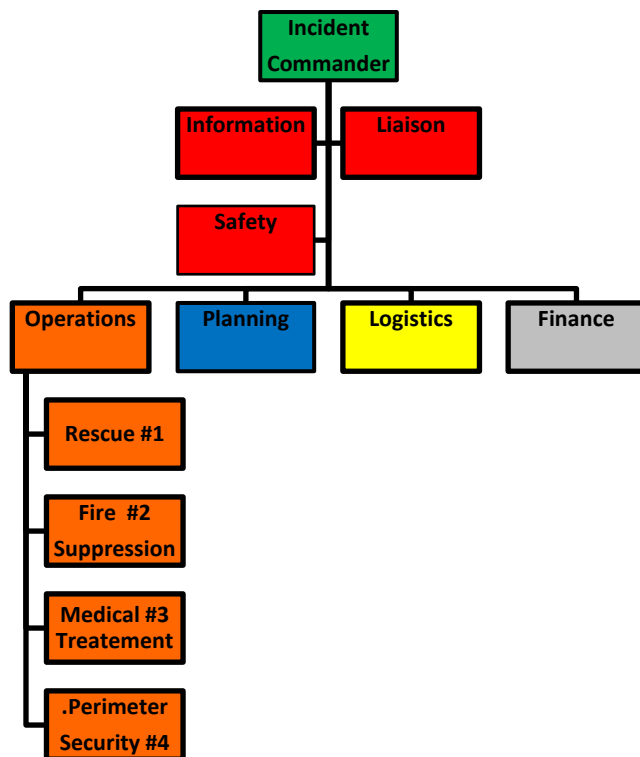
ORGANIZED BY GROUP

	Highway Div A	Parking Lot Div B	Office Div C
Rescue Obj #1			1 Rescue 1 Ladder
Fire Suppression Obj #2	4 Engines	2 Engines	5 Engines 1 Ladder
Treatment Obj #3	2 BLS	1 BLS	3 BLS 1 ALS
Perimeter Obj #4	3 Units	2 Units	7 Units

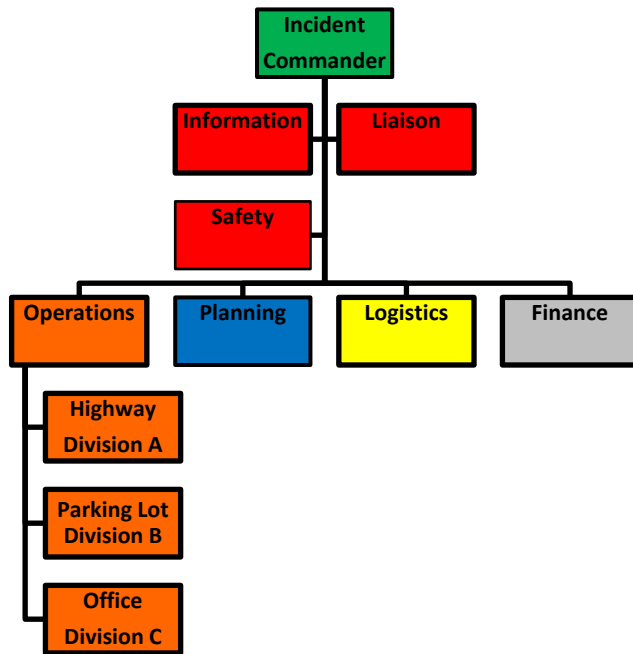
ORGANIZATION CHARTS WITH DIVSIONS AND GROUPS

Given the four Objectives (Rescue, Fire Suppression, Medical Treatment, and Perimeter Security) the ICS Organization Chart looks like one of the following:

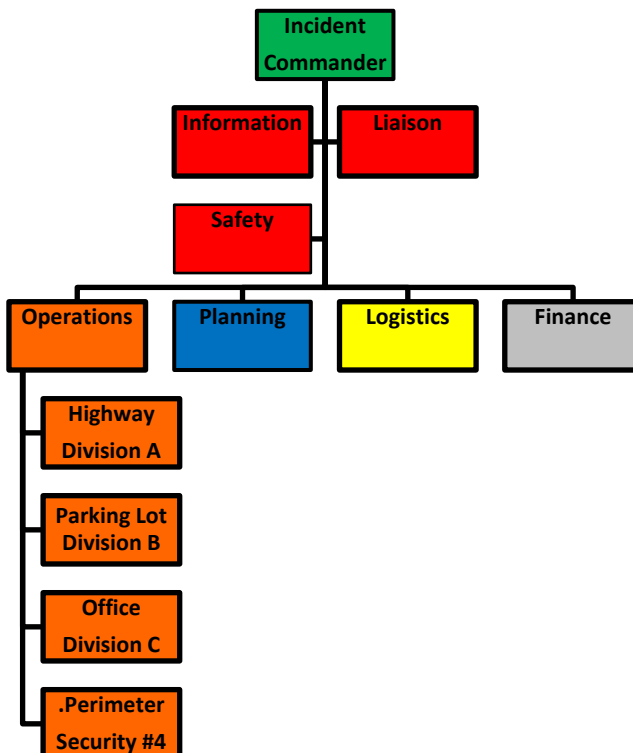
Organization with Functional Groups. As there are four Objectives, the organization chart shows the four Functional Groups.



Organization by Divisions; each area becomes a Division and the Divisions must do all four Objectives. In this example, there are three Divisions (Highway, Parking Lot, and Office) and all four Objectives are being accomplished by the Division Supervisor:



Mixed Divisions and Groups - Here are the four Objectives organized into a mix of three Divisions and one Group:



WHEN DO YOU USE WHICH?

I was not provided with a source for this material, but it provides a further explanation of why you might want to use Divisions rather than Groups or vice versa. This information may be useful for instructors evaluating exercises. If you know who created this, please send me an email to tom.cox@gov.ab.ca and I will give the recognition due! Thanks to Sandy Mckinnon of ICS Canada for passing this on.

Divisions

Resources assigned to a division are supervised by the same Division Supervisor.

Groups

Resources assigned to different groups report to different Group Supervisors, even when they work together on the same problem at the same location.

A Group Supervisor is responsible for all of the resources assigned to his/her group, even when they're involved in multiple independent tasks.

Considerations	Divisions	Groups	Rationale	Extreme example
Number of locations on the incident (or in the geographic Branch) where the function is being performed	More	Less	Tactics of moderate or greater complexity or risk, being performed in multiple locations, stretches the Group Supervisor's ability to effectively supervise. Better to have a Division Supervisor supervising complex/hazardous work being done in his/her division.	Having hazmat teams at five different locations would be a challenge for a Hazmat Group Supervisor. It would be better to have one active hazmat team per Division.

Considerations	Divisions	Groups	Rationale	Extreme example
Frequency and/or importance of interaction between functions that are co-located	More	Less	Functions that rely on frequent exchange of critical information, and that need frequent coordination of effort, are more effective when part of the same organization than when they report to separate Group Supervisors.	SWAT, a civil disturbance team, and squads of patrol officers all working the same location should report to Division Supervisor instead of to three different Group Supervisors who also supervise other like resources elsewhere (SWAT, civil disturbance, & patrol)

Considerations	Divisions	Groups	Rationale	Extreme example
Duration of a function's assignment at one location (how long do they stay put before going someplace else?)	Long	Short	Resources that move frequently around the incident, providing their service for short durations at each location, are adequately supervised by a Group Supervisor.	A resource that stays within a single division (or even within a couple of divisions) throughout the shift is more effectively supervised by the Division Supervisor who is responsible for that Division, than by someone who supervises the function.

Considerations	Divisions	Groups	Rationale	Extreme example
<p>The number of co-located functions</p> <p>An option: establish geographic divisions and staff with a Division Supervisor only, but rotate resources from groups through the division as needed. This provides enhanced coordination between resources during their assignment on the division, as well as enhanced supervision.</p>	3 or more	Two (if extensive or critical interaction, then Divisions should be considered even when only two functions are assigned)	If several or more functions are going to be performed within a division, the requisite coordination during the ops period would lead us to having the functions report to a Division Supervisor.	Hazmat, fire suppression, and EMS functions working together on a chemical plant fire / MCI should report to a Division Supervisor instead of to separate Group Supervisors.

MORE ON DIVISIONS

DIVISION NAMING CONVENTIONS

Wildfire response almost always use Divisions. The size of fires often makes Groups less effective due to travel distances. As well, the use of Divisions “breaks the Incident into bite-size pieces”.

When arriving at a wildfire, one of the key considerations is the wind. Will the wind allow the fire to take-off? If there is a great likelihood of a fire taking off, the convention is to start naming the Divisions on one side of the fire as “A, B, C...” and the other side of the fire as “Z, Y, X...”. In this way, as the fire grows, additional Divisions may be added along the way as needed. This is why you may see Divisions A, B, C, D and then W, X, Y, and Z but none of the alphabet between.

CREATING DIVISIONS

When creating Divisions, wildfire boundaries between adjoining Divisions often reflect geographic barriers which would prevent easy movement. Streams/rivers and gullies, with no easy access across, make natural dividing lines between one Division and the next.

SPAN OF CONTROL

In the classroom, instructors may emphasize that Divisions and Groups are put in place when the number of Divisions/Groups exceeds seven. But students may better understand Divisions/Groups if you also emphasize that Divisions/Groups will be made up of up to seven Strike Teams/Task Forces/Single Resources. Students often assume that a Division can only be made up of either Strike Teams or Task Forces. Yet, there may be situations, especially in Emergency Management, where a Single Resource may be reporting to a Supervisor.

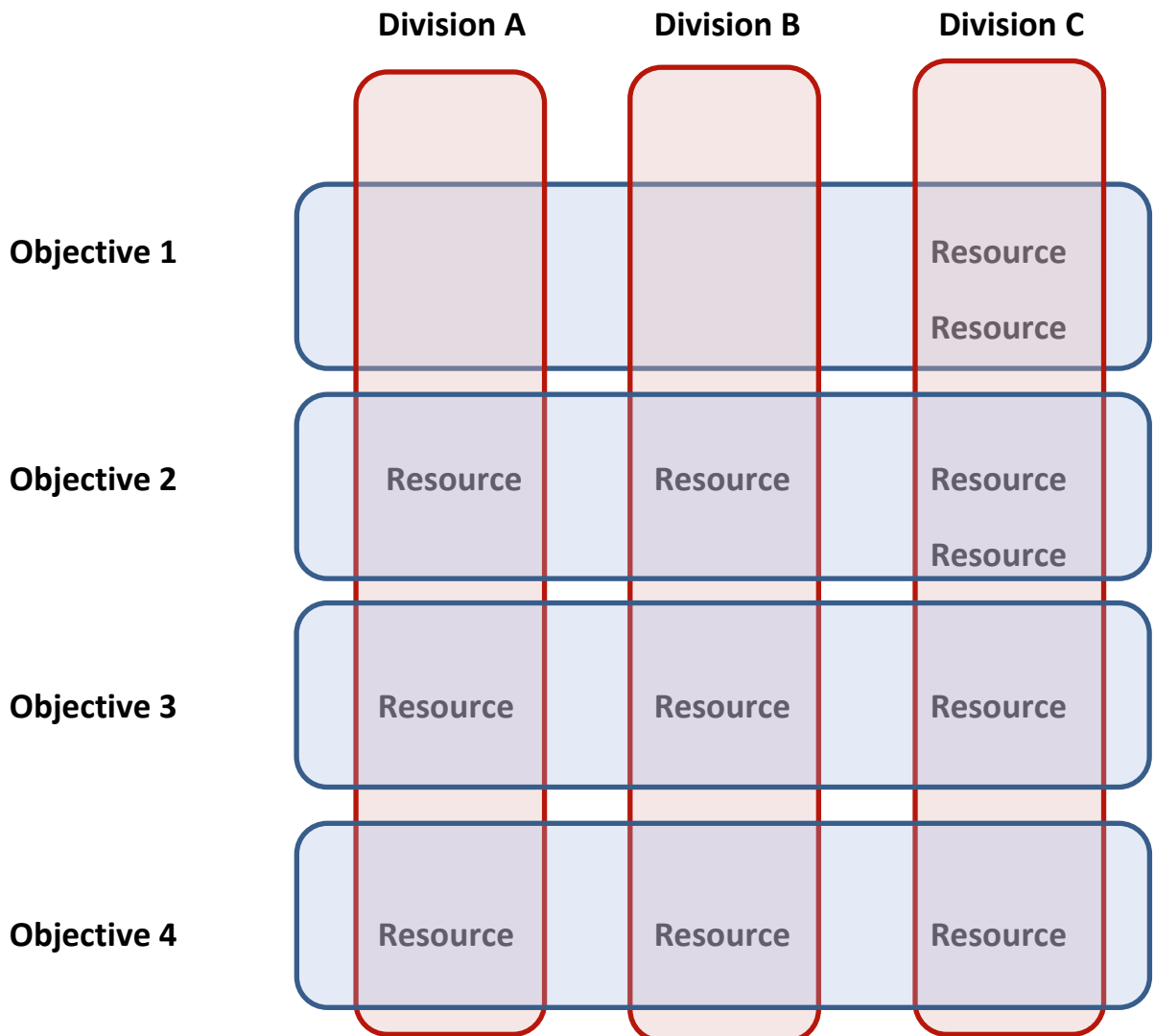
This is even more important to understand in relation to the Operations Section Chief. Each box under Operations does not have to have an equal number of Resources or the same levels of organization. An Operations Section may have one Branch of up to 400 Resources, one Group of around 50 Resources, a Strike Team of up to 7 resources, and a Single Resource. Four Objectives or “boxes” on the organization chart but each with a different amount of Resources to get the job done.

SUMMARY

As an ICS Instructor, when there are multiple Objectives and multiple sites you should have this picture in your mind and be able to organize the response (or the exercise) using either Divisions or Groups. Wildfire tends to organize geographically as their default because of the large work areas. Emergency Services tend to organize functionally because they are designed to deal with one type of emergency (or set/range of emergencies). If you understand this graphic, you can easily organize either way:

ORGANIZED BY DIVISION

ORGANIZED BY GROUP





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