



FIRE RESCUE

ALBEMARLE COUNTY

STANDARD OPERATING GUIDELINE

Subject: Communications Guidelines

Reference Number: SOG-OPS-011

Effective Date: 1 September 2007

Last Revision Date: N/A

Signature of Approval:

J. Dan Eggleston, Chief

Purpose:

Common and plain English language is imperative with regard to radio communications. The guidelines below meet the National Incident Management System (NIMS) standard and recommendations from the local NIMS team – consisting of law enforcement, fire, EMS, & ECC personnel. In some cases, the guidelines enhance and exceed the recommendations presented to the ECC Management Board.

These guidelines establish the use of common language in radio transmissions and a switch to the International Phonetic Alphabet. The NIMS Integration Center Guidance on Plain English Communications states: “It is required that plain English be used for multi-agency, multi-jurisdiction, and multi-discipline events...While the NIMS Integration Center doesn’t require plain English for internal operations, we strongly encourage it.” The Common Language Protocol directs public safety agencies to use plain English for day to day operations as first responders tend to revert back to their training in stressful situations.

Background:

This SOG was approved by the Albemarle County Fire Rescue Advisory Board at the 22 August 2007 meeting.

Definitions:

Included as part of guideline.

Guideline:

1. General Communications

- A. Be clear and concise. Speak in a clear, strong voice relaying all necessary information as quickly as possible.
- B. Think before speaking, thereby eliminating errors and reducing the possibility of having to repeat a message.
- C. Never acknowledge a transmission until it is fully understood.
- D. Keep radio traffic to a minimum at all times.

2. Basic Considerations

- A. Ensure you are on the correct talk group.
- B. Listen before transmitting to ensure the talk group is clear and available.
- C. Avoid lengthy descriptions and unnecessary repetition.
- D. Prior to speaking, depress the Push-to-Talk (PTT) button and wait for the “talk permit” tone.
- E. Hold the radio microphone close to the mouth and speak directly into it, not across it.
- F. Whenever possible, avoid transmitting when horns and sirens are operating.
- G. Remain calm; avoid uncivil, angry, abusive, derogatory, or sarcastic language/tones.
- H. Identify one’s self and transmit a message in a single transmission.

Example:

Ambulance 101: “ECC, Ambulance 101 returning ready.”

ECC: “Ambulance 101 returning ready, *time stamp*.”

- I. Avoid the routine use of “radio checks” and do not request strength and readability reports from ECC. In the rare instance that these tests are conducted, a concise statement of the test results must be issued. For example, “loud and clear,” “weak but readable,” and “unreadable” are acceptable test result descriptions.
- J. Never transmit via radio that an injured or deceased victim is fire rescue personnel.
- K. Transmit information using the call reference technique enabling ECC personnel to be prepared to perform a requested task or acknowledge radio traffic:
Examples:
 “ECC, Engine 101 responding”
 “ECC, Tower 101, address check?”
- L. Always use complete radio designation; never use only numerals.

3. Codes & Signals

- A. All radio traffic shall use plain English.
- B. The following are standard exceptions granted by NIMS and the Commonwealth of Virginia Interoperability Office:
 - a. *SIGNAL 1: MAYDAY!* A situation in which either the responder or dispatcher has identified an immediate threat and must convey this to a partner, other responders, or dispatcher without alerting the subject; may be used with or in place of Emergency Call Button. *Signal 1* or *MAYDAY!* may be used interchangeably.
 - b. *SIGNAL 2: ASSISTANCE:* A situation in which a responder needs assistance; however, there is no immediate threat to life
 - c. *SIGNAL 3: TAKE SUBJECT INTO CUSTODY:* Responder is taking subject into custody. A communications officer may also use this code to direct a responder to take a subject into custody and/or to expect resistance.
 - d. *SIGNAL 4: CONFIDENTIAL/CRITICAL INFORMATION TO BE RELAYED:* This code indicates a situation where a responder or communications officer has identified an immediate threat and must convey this information without alerting a subject or individual.

4. Busy Signal

- A. Used to indicate that the Communications Officer is unable to respond to over-the-air communications at the current time.
- B. Radio traffic may continue on the talk group but do not expect communications with the Communications Officer unless a "Priority Traffic" request is transmitted. (See "Priority Traffic" definition below.)

5. Communications Terminology

10-4	"Okay" or "Understood"
Acknowledge	"Let me know that you have received and understood the message"
Address Check	Responding apparatus requesting that an address be repeated or the calling party be contacted again to confirm the location
Advise	"Give this message to..."
Affirmative	"Yes"
Be Advised	Reflects the desire to make another party aware of specific information
Begin Tour	Personnel or apparatus are on duty and ready.
Confirm(ing)	"Verify the accuracy of the entire message that was just transmitted and correct it if necessary"
Correct	"What has just been transmitted is accurate"
Correction	"An error was made in the previous radio transmission. The correct version is..."
End Tour	Personnel or apparatus are off duty.
En Route	Apparatus or personnel are on the way to an event, stand-by, or hospital; used also to indicate a <u>non-emergent</u> response to an incident
Hold Traffic	All on-air personnel cease radio transmissions and traffic.
In-Service	Apparatus is mechanically sound, equipment is functional, and able to respond; <u>not</u> synonymous with "ready"
In-Quarters	Apparatus has safely arrived at a station; if multiple pieces of apparatus arrive in-quarters at once, one piece should transmit "All Station 10 apparatus in-quarters"
Mayday	Emergency distress signal that indicates that one or more personnel require emergency assistance
Negative	"No"
Not-Ready	Apparatus is not ready to respond to an incident; <u>not</u> synonymous with "out-of-service"
Okay	"Your message is received, understood, and will be complied with"
On Location	Apparatus or personnel have arrived at the scene of an incident, stand-by, or event
Out-of-Service	Apparatus is mechanically disabled or equipment is not functional, and unable to respond to incidents; <u>not</u> synonymous with "not-ready"
Priority Traffic	An <i>imminent</i> danger to live, limb, or property exists; <i>not</i> used simply due to heavy radio traffic or to relay routine radio traffic to the ECC
Ready	Apparatus is ready to respond to an incident; <u>not</u> synonymous with "in-service"
Repeat	"Repeat your message. I did not understand it the first time"
Responding	Given apparatus is responding (<u>emergently</u>) to an event or incident
Response Check	Verbal inquiry initiated by ECC to check if apparatus is responding to an incident
Returning	Apparatus or personnel are leaving the scene of an incident; usually used with terms "ready" or "not-ready"
Stand By	"Listen but do not transmit until directed to do so"
Status Air	Apparatus or personnel are away from an assigned location such as a station, performing errands or other tasks
Test Count	Used for the purposes of testing a specific radio or the radio system infrastructure; a five (5) count will be conducted twice: "1, 2, 3, 4, 5... 5., 4, 3, 2, 1."
Understood	"Your message is received, understood, and will be complied with"

6. Radio Designators

A lpha	Vehicle Operator
B ravo	Vehicle Officer or Attendant-In-Charge
C harlie	Jump Seat -Right or Attendant #1
D elta	Jump Seat -Left or Attendant #2
E cho	Tiller Operator

Example:

101A (alpha): Engine 101's operator

101B (bravo): Engine 101's officer

Ambulance	a Basic Life Support (BLS) transport apparatus manned with an EMT-B
Brush Truck/Quick Attack	4WD vehicle used for wildland, grass, or brush firefighting
Command Vehicle	vehicle designed for a Chief Officer to command and control small-to-medium scale incidents; large scale incidents utilize a mobile command post
Company	a crew of three (3) or more trained and released personnel (fire or EMS); <i>Example:</i> Engine Company/Tower Company/Squad Company/Ambulance Company
Duty "X"	a duty officer performing command and coordination responsibilities for a specific area, district, or system-wide
Engine	vehicle designed and used for fire attack; carries, hose and a minimum of 500+ gallons of water, and a fire pump; some with ability to supply foam and usually carries 3-6 personnel
Haz-Mat	vehicle designed to mitigate hazardous materials incidents and operations
Logistics	vehicles used and equipped to respond and handle mass casualty incidents or other specialized incidents
Medic	an Advanced Life Support (ALS) apparatus manned with an EMT-I, EMT-P or EMT-C
SERV or CAR Special Emergency Response Vehicle	non-transport EMS vehicles, first response vehicles, command vehicles, etc.
Squad	a vehicle carrying tools and equipment primarily utilized for vehicle extrication or other types of specialized rescue
Tanker	vehicle used to transport/shuttle large amounts water to the scene of a fire – usually key in rural water supply
Trauma	an Advanced Life Support (ALS) apparatus manned with an EMT-E or EMT-ST
Truck/Ladder/ Aerial/Tower	vehicle used for equipment and ladders; equipment may include lights, generators, salvage, extrication, overhaul tools, forcible entry, rescue, and ventilation tools
Utility	a multi-purpose station vehicle

7. Phonetic Alphabet

- A. To increase the clarity of radio transmissions, use the Phonetic Alphabet.
- B. By using words in conjunction with letters, clarity is enhanced and improved.
- C. When using the Phonetic Alphabet, identify the letter with the corresponding word. (A-Alpha, B-Bravo, C-Charlie, etc.)

A	Alpha	AL fah
B	Bravo	BRAH voh
C	Charlie	CHAR lee
D	Delta	DELL tah
E	Echo	ECK oh
F	Foxtrot	FOKS trot
G	Golf	GOLF
H	Hotel	HOH tell
I	India	IN dee ah
J	Juliet	JEW lee ett
K	Kilo	KEY low
L	Lima	LEE mah
M	Mike	MIKE

N	November	no VEM ber
O	Oscar	OSS car
P	Papa	pah PAH
Q	Quebec	keh BECK
R	Romeo	ROW me oh
S	Sierra	SEE air rah
T	Tango	TANG go
U	Uniform	YOU nee form
V	Victor	VIK tah
W	Whiskey	WISS key
X	X-ray	ECKS ray
Y	Yankee	YANG key
Z	Zulu	ZOO loo