

Genesee County Association of Fire Chief's Recommended Operating Guidelines

Effective 04-15-92
Revised 07-22-16
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SUBJECT: Radio Communications 92-1

SCOPE

This guideline shall apply to all Genesee County fire departments and dispatch systems that have access to all radio frequencies that are authorized and in use within Genesee County emergency dispatch and alarm network systems.

PURPOSE

The Genesee County Association of Fire Chief's recognizes that the manner in which radio communications are handled is often the measure of the efficiency of an organization and the attitude of the organizations individual membership.

The observance of some basic radio protocols and rules will expedite communications and improve the working relationship among all radio dispatch and alarm systems.

Application of the general protocols and rules outlined within this guideline will lead to a more professional performance.

GENERAL RADIO PROTOCOL

Radio usage during an emergency situation is not always a consistent flow of information. Before using the radio for any transmission, everyone shall make certain that the channel they wish to transmit on is clear. A request for "air time" is to be made before any tones or information is transmitted, when not involving an emergency incident, thus avoiding interruption of the emergency operation that may already be in progress.

Radio operations require the simple organization of the individual's thoughts before attempting transmission. Doing this will eliminate confusion and wasted time.

All transmissions should be brief, to the point, and avoid lengthy descriptions and unnecessary messages. Accuracy, brevity, and speed are all important, however, they should also be considered in that order.

The operator should speak distinctly and pronounce words carefully, speaking at a moderate rate, using a normal conversational tone of voice with natural emphasis and rhythm. Messages should be spoken in phrases and not one word at a time.

Operators should make sure the microphone push to talk (PTT) button is fully depressed and pause briefly before starting to speak. Mobile microphones should be held close to (approximately 1.5 to 2 inches), but not touching the mouth. Speak directly into the microphone and at a conversational level. Do not shout.

The operators should always use official titles, unit designation numbers, or equipment designations and/or locations for all transmissions, to identify to whom they are directing their communication.

The use of ten (10) codes is not authorized for fire communications, thus avoiding potential confusion with unit and personnel identification. Military jargon shall not be used. Only clear text shall be used for all radio communications.

During all radio operations, operators shall remain calm, and avoid uncivil, abusive, derogatory, or sarcastic remarks or language. Operators when faced with this type of situation shall maintain control, and not attempt retaliation, but precede with normal communication activities.

FIRE PAGING AND TALK GROUP USAGE

Fire paging (154.145) shall be used exclusively for the following:

- Dispatch of alarms from the Communications Center.
- County-wide announcements
- Pager tests
- Weather alerts
- Tests of the weather sirens, the first Saturday of the month at 1300 hours March - November.

The 800 MHz talk groups **shall** be used as follows:

Fire main (**25F911 and 25FLTF1**) will be used for:

- Dispatching fire departments;
- Communications between the Communications Center and fire officers, apparatus and department base radios;
- Unit response communication with the Communications Center shall be limited to (first unit enroute to the scene, first unit on scene, base radio on the air, base radio off the air);
- No unit to unit communications will take place on this talk group.

Fire ground talk groups (**25FG2 - 25FG10 and 25FLTF2 - 25FLTF6**) will be assigned to an incident by Central at the time of dispatch and will be used for:

- **All** communications by **all** departments responding to that incident (units checking enroute, units checking on scene, directions to the scene or instruction to responding units, tactical assignments, unit cancellation, etc.).
- All ambulances responding to a fire incident or EMS incidents in conjunction with a fire department will be instructed by the Communications Center to monitor the assigned fire ground talk group to allow communications between the EMS unit and the incident commander.
- The assigned fire ground will also be on the CAD dispatch.

Recommended procedure:

- Set all radios to scan Fire Main.
- First unit going to the scene checks en-route with the Communications Center on Fire Main, then goes to the assigned fire ground.
- All other units will immediately go to the assigned fire ground talk group, and check enroute on the assigned fire ground talk group.
- Base radio will sign on the air with the Communications Center on Fire Main and then immediately go to the assigned fire ground talk group.
- When the incident is terminated the Incident Commander will notify the Communications Center on Fire Main.
- All units stay on the assigned fire ground talk group until the incident is terminated and the base radio signs off the air with the Communications Center.

Department proprietary talk groups (**i.e. 25F21 – Atlas Twp**)

- A department's proprietary talk group used by the assigned department for interdepartmental communications as they determine. This will include all non-emergency communications between fire officers, apparatus and department base radios.
- The departments proprietary talk group will be used for all single department responses to weather related incidents, including but not limited to trees down, wires down and arcing wires. Fire ground talk groups will not be assigned for weather related incidents unless mutual aid is involved.

County special event talk groups (**25SPEV1 thru 25SPEV3**) will be assigned for use by the Communications Center.

Scene specific analog talk groups (**8TAC91 thru 8TAC94**) may be used for fire ground operations in the direct mode as needed.

Coordinator talk groups (**25COD1 and 25COD2**) will be used:

- For communication between responding units and Coordination Center (enroute, on scene, released and returning to the station, instructions or directions for responding units).
- Coordinator talk groups will also be used for communication between coordinators at a coordinated incident.

Recommended Procedure:

- Set all radios to scan Fire Main.
- All units responding to the coordinated incident immediately go to 25COD1.
- Check enroute with Coordination Center on 25COD1
- Stay on 25COD1 until you arrive on scene.
- Check on scene with Coordination Center on 25COD1.
- Go to incident fire ground talk group or other talk group as instructed.
- Stay on the assigned fire ground talk group or other assigned talk group until released from the scene or sent to staging or rehab. Return to coordination talk group (25COD1).

Special operations talk groups (**25SPO1 and 25SPO2**) will be assigned for use by the Communications Center.

Emergency Management talk groups (**25EMER1 and 25EMER2**) will be assigned for use by the Communications Center.

EMS talk groups (**25EMS1 and 25EMS2**):

- 25EMS1 will be used by the Communications Center for direct dispatching of EMS units and personnel.
- 25EMS2 will be used for ambulance to ambulance communications, ambulance to Genesee County Sheriff Paramedics communications, or any other EMS related unit to unit communications. This talk group may also be used by the Communications Center as a backup to 25EMS1.

The County Common talk group (**25COM**) will be used for:

- Communications between agencies as assigned by the Communications Center
- The talk group will be in every radio on the Genesee County 800 MHz system.

The Statewide Communications talk group (**STATW3**) may be used by any user to communicate with the Communications Center from anywhere in the State of Michigan. (This channel may not be immediately monitored)

Private calls are discouraged due to the resulting trunking system inefficiency. Use of cell phones is preferred over a private call to keep a channel from being tied up on the private call.

DISPATCH AND RADIO PROTOCOLS

The Communications Center will dispatch all fire calls according to this recommended operating guideline.

The appropriate fire department(s) will be dispatched using the county fire paging frequency 154.145. The dispatcher shall give the following information one time on the paging frequency (154.145):

- Name of fire department(s) being dispatched.
- The type of incident
- The address or location of the incident
- The assigned fire ground or Coordinator talk group

All communications related to an incident will remain on the assigned fire ground talk group, except that the Incident Commander will use the Fire Main, talk group (25F911) to initiate communications with Communications Center. Communications Center will use the assigned fire ground talk group to contact the Incident Commander. Doing this will not require the IC or Communications Center to monitor more than one talk group. During times of major incidents; commercial fires, major residential fires, initial hazardous materials response, extended or difficult rescue incidents etc. the incident commander may request that the fire ground talk group be monitored by the 911 supervisor or another dispatcher. This will play a major part in the elimination of missed or confusing radio traffic due to the switching of radio talk groups at critical times during incidents. This action will only occur until such time as the incident is stabilized. This action does not replace the need for a dedicated radio operator at individual departments during incidents.

CALLING MAYDAY

All crews working inside a structure will have at least one portable radio set on the assigned fire ground talk group.

A MAYDAY shall be declared by personnel for any sudden life-threatening occurrence that may injure, trap, disorient or distress emergency personnel during an emergency incident. Witnesses to the event shall declare a MAYDAY, if one is not made by those directly involved. Specific examples that warrant a MAYDAY include:

- Fall through roof/floor
- Building collapse
- Activated pass alarm/low air alarm
- Caught in flashover or backdraft
- Lost with no line/direction out
- Trapped

To declare a MAYDAY the firefighter will activate their emergency alert button on their portable radio and transmit, "MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY". The person transmitting the MAYDAY will provide the following information:

- Location
- Unit number
- Name
- Assignment
- Resources needed

Personnel who become trapped or disoriented should execute all necessary self-rescue activities to assist in their own rescue (including activation of their PASS device (after radio transmission), tapping noise, flashlight, etc.)

Once a MAYDAY call is received the dispatcher at the Communications Center will sound the emergency alert tones and announce for all units on the fire ground to hold radio traffic that there is a MAYDAY on the fire ground, Unit with the MAYDAY you have the air.

Upon receipt of a MAYDAY, Command shall order all personnel to cease radio traffic on the assigned fire ground talk group. The fire ground talk group will be kept open to communication with the distressed personnel. Command will designate one person to monitor the fire ground talk group and monitor progress in locating the distressed personnel. Command shall request a second fire ground talk group for incident operations.

Once the distressed personnel are located and removed from danger, Command will order the emergency alert button reset and notify dispatch that the MAYDAY is cancelled.

If an emergency alert is transmitted or Communications Center notifies Command that an emergency alert has been transmitted they shall treat it as a MAYDAY, until proven otherwise.

EMERGENCY ALERT TONES

The radio emergency alert tone is a warbled tone that is activated by the Communications Center. This tone should be an indication for all radio traffic to cease and for all personnel operating on the fire ground to prepare for emergency radio traffic

EMERGENCY EVACUATION SIGNAL

See ROG 91-2 Firefighter Safety. Sub-section Emergency Evacuation Signal.

COMMUNICATION RESPONSIBILITIES FOR EMERGENCY DISPATCH AND ALARM NETWORK SYSTEMS

The primary emergency dispatch center is the Genesee County Communications Center.

The Communications Center will dispatch the appropriate fire department to the emergency incident upon receiving a call through the 9-1-1 emergency phone system. The dispatcher will continue to monitor the frequency, receive communications as necessary, and relay information as required.

The Mundy Township radio alarm network shall be placed in operation when a request for emergency coordinators assistance system has been received. (See ROG 91-1 Emergency Coordination). Mundy Township Station #2 will be under the control of the county coordinators during a county emergency coordination incident, and shall become the coordination center.

The Communications Center will provide, upon request of the incident commander, additional assistance in notification of various agencies as follows:

- Consumer's Energy and other utilities.
- The Genesee County Road Commission.
- The Department of Natural Resources.
- Michigan State Police, Fire Investigator.
- Police agencies.
- Emergency medical service agencies.
- Genesee County Office of Emergency Management.
- Other response agencies as required or requested.
- Mutual aid requests.

Provide countywide announcements at 1800 hours upon request and authorization of the department fire chief. Countywide announcements shall consist of the following information:

- Firefighter deaths;
- Countywide training announcements;
- Other information of a county-wide nature that time would not allow notification through normal departmental procedures.
- Countywide training announcements at a time other than 1800 will be done at the request of the training committee chairman. (i.e.) academy class cancelled due to sever weather.

Provide announcements of emergencies that are of a county-wide emergency or requirement, including:

- Severe thunderstorm warning;
- Tornado watch or warning;
- Flood watch or warning;
- Heavy snow warning;
- Activation of the county coordinator emergency system.

If during the weather warning time period more information becomes available, additional updates will be broadcast without reactivation of the countywide tones. All personnel should switch their receivers to the monitor mode to receive weather updates.

RADIO PROCECURE FOR SITE TRUNKING

In the event radio's go into "site trunking" communications on Fire Ground talk groups may not be possible. All departments should have their radio's set to direct mode for the 8TAC channels.

To do this, while the radio is ON turn your channel selector to an 8TAC channel. Once selected press the small button on the side of your radio with two dots on it, this will be located above the push to talk button. Once pressed you should see a I+I symbol above the TAC channel. This should be done for any 8TAC channel being used in direct mode. Once the symbol is displayed those channels will be set in direct mode.

Note: Some templates have the 8TAC channels built into zone "C" while others do not. In all radios zone "F" will have all the 8CALL and 8TAC channels. With newer templates there are also 8TAC channels with direct mode already built in and will display with a D behind the descriptor. (Example: 8TAC91D).

In the event radio's go into "site trunking" on scene communications take place in direct mode on 8TAC91, 8TAC92, 8TAC93, or 8TAC94. In the event communication is needed with the 911 center attempts should be made in the following order:

1. Fire Main
2. 8TAC91 (NOT in direct mode)
3. 25COM
4. Cell Phone

RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE BASE STATION RADIO OPERATION FOR INDIVIDUAL FIRE DEPARTMENTS

Base station radios are to "sign on the air" on fire main with fire dispatch at the beginning of emergency operations, and are to "sign off the air" on fire main at the conclusion of all emergency operations by department name.

Base station radios are to assist the incident commander by providing or conveying pertinent information relating to the emergency incident when requested.

During weather related incidents the department base radio will monitor Fire Main (25F911) and receive additional calls and relay them to units in the field. Calls received while a department's base radio is on the air will not be pager dispatched, only radio dispatched.

Base station radios shall relay information as requested by the incident commander to Genesee Central.

All mutual aid units, when responding to a mutual aid request, may only communicate with their base radios on their proprietary talk group. They shall only communicate with the base radio of the department they are to assist on the assigned fire ground talk group, or on either COD1 or COD 2 talk group with the coordinators at Mundy Township, if responding to an emergency coordination incident.

RESPONSIBILITES OF RADIO AMATEUR CIVIL EMERGENCY SERVICE (RACES)

The Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) will provide backup radio communications should all other radio communication systems fail. RACES will operate under the direct supervision of Incident Command Staff Officers and Fire Coordinators. All RACES personnel operating on an incident scene will be assigned to a fire officer or fire coordinator and will work under their direction. RACES personnel not assigned shall report to the incident staging area and remain there until assigned by a fire officer or fire coordinator.

ENFORCEMENT

The Genesee County Association of Fire Chief's shall provide for the monitoring of the frequencies as required by this operating guideline, where corrective action is required or considered necessary, the parties concerned shall submit the facts and circumstances in writing to the Genesee County Association of Fire Chief's Radio Committee for disposition.

The final sanctions shall rest with the Genesee County Association of Fire Chief's.