

	Standard Operating Guidelines: OPS 21	
Subject:	Incident Communications	
Effective Date:	March 1, 2023	
Director:		<i>William Ferguson</i>

PURPOSE:

Franklin County Public Safety shall assure that appropriate, understandable, and professional communications always occur between field staff and the emergency communications center. Radio communications in the fire and emergency services are not as simple as pushing a button on the radio and saying what you want to say. Each radio transmission should be carefully thought out. The transmission should be necessary and relevant to the mission.

Communication is a critical issue in the fire and rescue service. We rely on our personnel to provide information that not only sets the stage for the incident, but also will impact the strategies and tactics employed. Improper communications complicate incident operations and can result in danger to the crews involved.

Two keys to effective communications are:

- Clear and concise communications are essential to the mission. When making radio transmissions, firefighters and EMS personnel should use plain language without using slang or jargon. This will help ensure all personnel understand what is being said.
- Training is not just for keeping current on fire and EMS skills and knowledge; it is important for communications as well. All personnel shall train often on radio usage and radio technology/functionality. As with any skill, radio usage is a skill in which personnel must remain proficient. If personnel do not practice emergency and routine radio transmissions regularly, or understand how radio equipment works, skills will weaken. This decreases the chance of effectively calling for help.

This document is intended to give radio users guidance on best practices for radio communications and provide examples of common terms and phrases, radio reports, and unnecessary radio traffic.

Common Language

The Commonwealth of Virginia's Office of Interoperability has realized a need for a Common Language Protocol. This need has become a statewide effort to create interoperability throughout all jurisdictions of the Commonwealth. This protocol applies to all persons who use a public safety, public service, or other radio system. It allows the use of signals to rapidly identify the needs of the user or responder. This common language protocol addresses two primary communications areas: the phonetic alphabet and signals.

Phonetic Alphabet

The following is the Commonwealth of Virginia's Phonetic Alphabet. This alphabet shall be used when communicating information (i.e., building sides, quadrants, pole numbers, etc.) over the radio:

A-Alpha B- Bravo C- Charlie D- Delta E-Echo F-Foxtrot G-Golf H-Hotel I-India J-Juliet
K-Kilo L-Lima M-Mike N-November O –Oscar P-Papa Q-Quebec R-Romeo S-Sierra
T-Tango U-Uniform V-Victor W-Whiskey X-Xray Y-Yankee Z-Zulu

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS CENTER

The ECC serves as a vital link between call intake and unit response. Serving as a primary resource in the quality assurance of event types, selection of appropriate resources, announcement of event information, and fulfilling unit requests.

Dispatch Procedures:

- A. The Franklin County E-9-1-1 Center will be designated as "FRANKLIN" when dispatching all Fire/EMS calls. The dispatcher call sign is "FRANKLIN" on all operations channels.
- B. Operation channels will be assigned by the emergency communications center or requested by the Incident Commander.

Channel	Purpose	
Channel 1	F&R Dispatch	
Channel 2	Routine EMS Incidents	Voiced "Ops2"
Channel 3	Single Company/Resource Fire Incidents	Voiced "Ops3"
Channel 4	Tactical Operations Channel	Voiced "Ops 4"
Channel 5	Tactical Operations Channel	Voiced "Ops5"
Channel 6	Tactical Operations Channel/Life Guard LZ	Voiced "Ops6"
Channel 7	Future Use	
Channel 8	FC ALL	
Channel 9	PS ALL	
Channel 10	MC FMH	
Channel 11	CO FR MC	
Channel 12	M/A SO PS1	
Channel 13	M/A SO PS2	
Channel 14	Agency Private Channel	
Channel 15	7TAC52D	
Channel 16	F&R Dispatch	

Ops 6 shall be the last operations channel assigned. This channel will predominantly be used for medivac events with Life Guard.

The following incidents shall be assigned to a tactical operations channel (4-6):

- Structure Fires
- HAZ MAT
- MVAs
- Water Rescue
- SOT Incidents
- Large scale EMS or MCI events

The incident operations channel shall be assigned at the time of dispatch. The dispatcher shall use the following sequence and information in the initial dispatch:

1. Activate Tone(s) (Twice between the hours of 2300-0700)
2. Unit(s)
3. Address and landmark if applicable (Wal-Mart, Sheetz, DMV, etc.)
4. Call type
5. Operations channel

The short report is provided on the assigned operations channel when the first unit dispatched marks enroute.

Example:

Dispatch – *“M1-2, Department 1, North Main Street and State Street, motor vehicle accident, operate on Ops 4”*

Units shall mark responding on the assigned operations channel and all additional radio traffic occurs on the assigned channel.

Individuals (POVs) responding to the station or scene shall use the agency private channel, not the operations or dispatch channel. Only those volunteers authorized by their respective volunteer leadership shall the authority to provide on-scene and situation reports when arriving by POV.

Radio Identification

The following shall be administrative radio designations:

• PS 1	Director of Public Safety
• PS 2	Deputy Chief, Operations
• Captain 1	Fire/EMS System Supervisor
• Lieutenant 1	Fire/EMS System Supervisor
• EMS 1	Operational Medical Director
• Training 1	EMS Training Coordinator
• Training 2	Fire Training Coordinator
• Training 3	FCDPS Training Staff
• Comm 1	Communications Coordinator
• Admin. 1	County Administrator
• Admin. 2	Assistant County Administrator
• FM 1	Fire Marshal

• FM 2	Deputy Fire Marshal
• 70	Animal Shelter Manager
• 71	Animal Control Officer
• 72	Animal Control Officer
• Utility 1	Utility Truck
• Logistics 1	Logistical Support Vehicle
• EOC	County Emergency Operations Center
• 200-2199	Career Staff Individual Designation
• PS20 – 29	Chaplains
• 1601-1699	Volunteer ALS Providers

EMS Station radio designations:

• Ambulance	BLS capable transport unit (future use)
• Medic	Advanced Life Support Ambulance
• Response	Non-Transporting EMS Vehicle
• Captain	EMS Station/Shift Supervisor
• Lieutenant	EMS Station/Shift Supervisor
• 2-2-0 thru 2-2-99	Squad 2 personnel
• 2-5-0 thru 2-5-99	Squad 5 personnel
• 2-6-0 thru 2-6-99	Squad 6 personnel
• 2-8-0 thru 2-8-99	Squad 8 personnel
• 2-9-0 thru 2-9-99	Squad 9 personnel
• 2-10-0 thru 2-10-99	Squad 10 personnel

Fire Station radio designations:

• Engine	NFPA 1901 compliant fire apparatus designed for fire attack
• Pumper/Wagon	Non NFPA compliant fire apparatus designed for fire attack
• Ladder	NFPA compliant fire apparatus with straight truck mounted ladder
• Tower	NFPA compliant fire apparatus with “Bucket” designed for fire attack.
• Brush	NFPA 1906/1901 compliant fire apparatus designed for wildland fires
• Utility/Truck/Unit	Support apparatus designed to carry equipment or personnel
• Air	Support apparatus designed for response to provide breathable air
• Mini-Pumper/Attack	NFPA 1901 compliant apparatus designed for “QUICK” initial attack
• Rescue/Crash	Apparatus designed to carry extrication and suppression equipment
• Tanker	NFPA compliant apparatus designed for carrying water
• Department 1	Rocky Mount Volunteer Fire Department
• Chief	Fire Station Supervisor
• Deputy/AC	Fire Station Deputy Supervisor
• 3-1-0 thru 3-1-99	Department 1 personnel
• 3-3-0 thru 3-3-99	Company 3 personnel
• 3-4-0 thru 3-4-99	Company 4 personnel
• 3-5-0 thru 3-5-99	Company 5 personnel
• 3-6-0 thru 3-6-99	Company 6 personnel
• 3-7-0 thru 3-7-99	Company 7 personnel
• 3-8-0 thru 3-8-99	Company 8 personnel

- 3-9-0 thru 3-9-99 Company 9 personnel
- 3-10-0 thru 3-10-99 Company 10 personnel
- 3-14-0 thru 3-14-99 Company 14 personnel

Portable and mobile radios owned by any public safety agency or affiliate agency will be programmed with identical channels and only by programmers authorized by the Director of Public Safety.

ELEMENTS OF A RADIO REPORT

Radio Reports

Radio reports are means for fire and rescue personnel to speak directly to each other and/or the communications center. Communication should focus on critical information based on the event. Proper radio reports assist in the development of sound strategies and tactics and the development of an incident action plan to mitigate the incident.

When making a radio transmission DO NOT:

1. Transmit personal or non-business messages.
2. Transmit while standing too close to another radio.
3. Use profanity, exchange pleasantries, or offer personal greetings.
4. Use names on the radio (except in a MAYDAY situation or if missing a member during a PAR check).

The 4-C model is the only communication process endorsed by the United State Fire Administration (USFA) and National Fire Academy (NFA). The 4 C model is really either a four or three step process. The 4-Step method should be used when there is a LOW expectation that the receiver of the order to be listening. The 3-Step method should be used if there is a HIGH expectation that the receiver of the order to be listening. If the 3-Step method is used but the receiver does not hear it; airtime is wasted. All radio transmissions must be short, to the point, and non-conversational.

Four Step Method:

1. Connect to Receiver
2. Convey Order
3. Clarify Order
4. Confirm Understanding of Order

Three Step Method (most commonly used):

1. Connect AND Convey Order
2. Clarify Order
3. Confirm Understanding of Order

Example:

1. Connect Sender and Convey Order: "*M1-4 from Command. Stretch handline to division 2.*"
2. Clarify Order: "*M1-4 copies, handline to division 2.*"
3. Confirm Understanding of Order: "*Affirmative M1-4.*"

Note the 4 C model uses the "hey you it's me" order of communication. Always answer with your unit designator followed by your response, not the unit calling you or "go ahead".

Report	Description
Water Supply	<p>Direct from Attack Engine to Supply Tanker.</p> <p><i>“Tanker 3 from Engine 3. I’m dropping my line at the end of the short driveway. Pick it up, supply Engine 3 and set up for as the dump site Tanker” “Tanker 3 copy: We’ll pick up the line at the end of the driveway and prepare to nurse Engine 3.”</i></p>
On Scene	<p>The on-scene report includes only three basic items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building height (Number of stories above ground). • Occupancy type. • Brief report of conditions evident (To include side of the structure conditions are evident, quadrant located, and description of conditions). <p><i>“Engine 7 on the scene side of a two-story, single-family dwelling, fire showing from one window, division 1, side delta.</i></p>
Size up/Situation Report after conducting the 360 lap	<p>The situation report is communicated on the assigned operations channel to Franklin and includes three basic items:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Findings on the lap (as appropriate) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Differences in elevation. b) Identify the floors: B, 1 and 2 etc. c) Foundation • Basement (type) • Slab • Crawl Space d) Location and extent of fire 2. Occupant status <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) “Occupants are reported trapped” b) “Occupants are reported out” c) “Occupant Status Unknown” 3. Your actions and needs <p><i>“Engine 15 has completed the lap and have a 2 in the front 3 in the rear single family with a walkout basement. The floors will be labeled basement, 1, and 2. Fire on the division 1, quadrant Charlie. Occupant status is unknown. Engine 15 will be advancing handline through the front door Request to transfer command.”</i></p>

Command Statement	<p>A command statement contains three basic components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify who you are • Name the command • Identify the location of the command post <p>Example:</p> <p><i>Chief 6: "Chief 6 establishing Sontag Road Command, Side Alpha in front of Engine 6."</i></p>
C.AN. Report	<p>To assist command with gathering information for the incident.</p> <p>A C.A.N. report is a quick means of asking for a situation report. C.A.N. report:</p> <p>C – Conditions A – Actions N – Needs</p> <p>Example:</p> <p><i>Command - "Engine 9 from Command, CAN report" Engine 9 – "Command from Engine 9 (Conditions) On the division 1 we have considerable heat & smoke conditions with a fire in the kitchen area. (Actions) Engine 9 has a line on the fire. (Needs) requesting horizontal ventilation on the first floor and check for extension on the division 2."</i></p>

When incident command has been established, all communications from dispatch or responding units shall go through the incident commander. All units operating on the scene shall provide all radio reports and resource requests directly to the incident commander, not the controlling dispatcher.

Emergent Communications

When personnel are confronted with hostile environments and need to covertly request law enforcement, one of the three methods should be used:

Signal 1	Imminent threat to personnel and need to covertly request LE response
Signal 2	The incident scene has the potential to become hostile, send LE
Signal 4	Need to relay sensitive information

When a signal 1 is declared (confirmed), the dispatcher shall dispatch LE and Captain 1 to the location of the Signal 1. If the Emergency Activation (orange) button is activated, the dispatcher will make two attempts to contact the unit. If no contact is made, the activation will be handled as a Signal 1.

Safety Checks

For EMS events, the controlling dispatcher will conduct safety checks every 20 minutes after the first unit marks on-scene. Once the scene has been declared safe by the primary EMS unit, safety checks are no longer required.

For suppression events, the controlling dispatcher will conduct safety checks every 20 minutes. Once the Incident Commander has declared the event stable, the safety checks are no longer required.

Common Language

Phrase/Word	Definition
Search is negative	Primary or secondary search completed with no victims found.
Fire Conditions	
Fire Showing	Fire is visible upon arrival.
Fully Involved	100% fire involvement indicating a defensive attack/no entry to IDLH.
Extending	Fire spreading to another occupancy, floor, portion of the building, etc.
No Extension	Used to describe no interior and exterior fire transmission to another area or object.
Fire is knocked down (knock on the fire)	Notification that majority of fire conditions have been extinguished and fire is contained.
Smoke Conditions	
Smoke Showing	Smoke is visible upon arrival.
Haze in the building	Light volume of smoke visible in the structure.
Zero Visibility	Interior condition indicating smoke to the floor.
Operational Modes	
Investigative	Process where initial units are determining the scope of the incident and what tactical actions will need to occur.
Offensive	Indicates direct attack on fire, whether starting from the interior or exterior.
Defensive	Exterior attack – exposure protection with no interior attack.
Under Control	Used to describe status of the event – fire may not be out completely.
Withdrawal	Coordinated relocation of units and their equipment, operating from an area deemed untenable, to a specific area deemed safe to continue operations.
Evacuate	Units without a hoseline will immediately remove themselves from the structure. The engine company should maintain a hoseline in place to protect the evacuation of those personnel.
Communications Transmissions	
Direct	Unit heard and understood traffic that was not directed at them.
Ok, copy, acknowledge	Unit heard and understood traffic directed at them.
Disregard	Never mind.
Affirmative	Yes.
Negative	No.
Repeat	Repeat traffic.
Stand-By	Unit needs time to formulate a response to a question or is currently involved in a task.
P.A.R.	Response to P.A.R., all personnel are accounted for properly.
Emergency Radio Operations	
MAYDAY	Firefighter lost, trapped, or missing.
Emergency Traffic	Request for clear airtime to transmit emergency condition.

PORTRABLE RADIO USE AND PREFERRED PLACEMENT IN THE IDLH

The portable radio is a critical tool for firefighters and EMS providers on a daily basis and it must be properly placed in order to reduce the possibility of radio ejection from the user, to minimize radio frequency (RF) loss, to protect the remote speaker mic (RSM) cord from high thermal temperatures and provide the user the ability to make critical radio transmissions under stressful situations.

The portable radio should be immediately available for each member in the IDLH ready for use, easily accessible and working correctly when the user makes or receives a critical transmission. **Only department issued RSMs shall be used and shall remain connected/paired to the portable radio.** Removing the RSM or using non-department issued RSMs increases the likelihood of damage to the contact points and housing.

Donning the portable radio requires repeated training to increase the chance of a successful transmission. It is recommended that the keypad always remains locked other than when actively changing zones. The optimal placement with structural firefighting gear:

- Placement under the coat in a radio strap and case that is properly fitted to each user.
- Proper personal protective equipment (PPE) is donned with the portable radio in the leather case protruding below the coat line and canted away from the body. This position provides the least amount of RF loss. This will be done in accordance with individual department policy as a best practice.
- The RSM cord and leather strap should be concealed under the coat.
- The RSM should exit in the space between the top flap of the PPE coat and below the neck strap with minimal RSM cord exposure.
- The RSM is recommended to be secured with an optional cord retractor which is easily accessible. The primary purpose of this position is to provide a level of thermal protection to the RSM cord, while reducing the possibility of radio ejection. Wearing the portable radio in the same manner on all calls for service increases muscle memory and repeated repetition increases the chance of a successful radio transmission in a stressful situation.

The pictures below illustrate the correct and incorrect methods for carrying a portable radio:



Measure the strap length prior to donning turn out coat to ensure radio will hang below coat line.

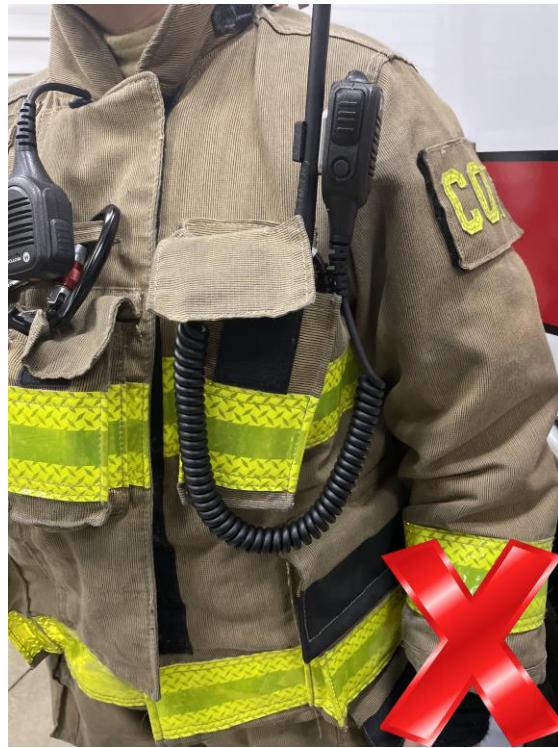
Zip/buckle the coat bringing RSM over the top at the collar line.



Secure the coat and neck flap while securing RSM to the turn out coat.



The radio must fall below the coat line with the antenna outside of the coat.



If worn in the turn out coat pocket, RSM cable must be tucked in to protect the cord from heat exposure



When using the RSM with SCBA, place the RSM against the voice port of the SCBA facepiece, not the regulator.

MAYDAY Communications

A Mayday is a term used to report situations where a firefighter(s) is in distress or may require assistance in an IDLH atmosphere.

In the event of a **MAYDAY**, the mayday will remain on the channel it is called on, and all other personnel may be directed to another designated channel. If no other channel is designated for operations, it is imperative all personnel not involved in the **MAYDAY** rescue maintain radio discipline.

It is the responsibility of the incident commander to maintain control of the incident using multiple radios to monitor both the **MAYDAY** and the complete exit of the structure by all crews on scene. It is highly recommended to appoint a command aide early in the incident to help track personnel and resources.

When Do You Report a Mayday? As soon as you realize that you are at risk or lost, communicate with your crew and command with a “Mayday” and your best possible location in the building (floor, side, and quadrant). Examples:

- Self-declared:
 - Lost/disoriented
 - Trapped
 - Low on air, which compromises egress
 - Medical emergency
- Third-party
- Witnessed aforementioned situations
- Command initiated

How to Call a Mayday?

State “Mayday, Mayday, Mayday.”
U:State the unit number (E7)
N:Position and name (e.g., “Firefighter Smith.”)
L:Location (e.g., “I’ve fallen into the basement, quadrant Bravo.”)
AR: Nature of emergency (“I can’t get out, need a ladder, air supply is 2000)

The sequence above is consistent with current fire service literature and training methods. Note that the most important information to transmit is listed in order of importance. The acronym LUNAR is used but the letters are scrambled to meet the critical points of the **MAYDAY** message.

Dispatch Procedures Following a Mayday

- Ensure the IC acknowledged the Mayday call. Advise the IC of the Mayday ONLY if the Mayday was not acknowledged by the IC.
- If incident command has not been established, the dispatcher shall acknowledge the Mayday, multi-select with the primary dispatch channel, initiate a three second alert tone, and make a quick announcement a Mayday has been declared.
- Maintain radio discipline. Document actions into the CAD notes.
- Assign a dispatcher to closely monitor all radio traffic on the tactical channel.
- Do not initiate operational responsibilities until directed by the IC (i.e., Emergency Evacuation tones, etc.)
- Dispatch an additional EMS transport unit.

If the dispatcher receives a Mayday from an individual not operating on the assigned incident channel/zone, the dispatcher should immediately notify the Incident Commander. In addition, the dispatcher shall:

- Gather LUNAR information from the firefighter.
- Do not have firefighters attempt to switch channels.
- Maintain open communication with the firefighter calling the Mayday.