

DISPATCHING/RADIO USE

**INCLUDES:
ELECTRICAL EMERGENCY
HAZ MAT DISPATCHING
SEVERE WEATHER PROTOCOL**

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR USE OF COMMON RADIO COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

Section 1: Dispatching Emergency Calls

Dispatches are to respond to any call for fire, rescue, first aid, motor vehicle accidents, chemical spills, mutual aid, any other call where they are not sure whether it is an emergency or non-emergency **as an emergency**. Special messages, officer's pages, firefighter pages, investigations or inspections are to be pre-alerted as "non-emergency" calls.

All emergency traffic (dispatching of emergency calls, maydays, etc.) shall have an immediate priority over all other radio traffic.

Prior to dispatching an emergency call, or making any other announcement, the dispatcher shall check for ongoing radio traffic so as not to interrupt. (Keeping in mind that emergency traffic has priority.) Pre-alert announcements shall be made to notify all other radio users to clear the air so that emergency communications may be dispatched.

For example, the dispatcher shall indicate "Box 100, structure fire call, New Middletown" or "single station response, motor vehicle accident, New Middletown". Pre-announcements may be brief. For example, "emergency call, Coitsville". The district number should also be included.

All emergency calls (with tones) shall be repeated after one minute if there is no response. Additional stations or mutual aid departments should be requested if there is no response within three (3) minutes. (An exception may be made in the case of an EMS response where an ambulance is already on the scene or is less than five (5) minutes from the scene.)

Section 2: Response Information and Acknowledgment

During the transmission of each emergency page, all pertinent information should be transmitted to responding firefighters. This information should include, at a minimum, the District number, the type of Box alarm, the location and address of the call, cross streets for the call location, the nature of the call, and any special warnings or hazards associated with the response route or the nature of the emergency itself. Where a structure fire is reported, the nearest hydrant location, if known, should also be provided to responding units. If additional information is received after the first page, a second alert page should be made.

All mutual aid (M.A.B.A.S.) calls should be dispatched in accordance with the M.A.B.A.S. plan and protocol.

Section 3: Fire Officers Marking In Route

All chief officers shall notify the dispatcher that they are in route directly to the scene (unless the Chief responds directly to a fire station). Upon notification that a chief officer is in route directly to a scene, all pertinent radio information should be provided to the Chief Officer. For example:

Chief 90:	Chief 90 to Central
CC:	Go ahead Chief 90
Chief 90:	In route direct to the scene (address may be provided)
CC:	Chief 90, you're responding directly to the scene (of a structure fire located at [address] (if not already provided)

All other officers will simply mark in route to his or her respective station. The dispatcher will not be contacted, and the officer's notification that he or she is in route will not be acknowledged by the dispatcher. This communication is for internal notification to other firefighters and officers only. No more than one (1) officer per station should mark on the air that he or she is in route to the station.

Section 4: Marking Stations In Service

Firefighters arriving at fire stations may mark that fire station is "manned" and may identify the number of firefighters present. This communication is for internal notification only. The dispatcher will not acknowledge the transmission and the firefighter shall not attempt to contact the dispatch center unless additional specific information must be conveyed.

Section 5: Apparatus In Route or On The Scene

All units should use plain English communications. For location information, apparatus should use the following terms: Engine #_____:

- a. "In route to..."
- b. "On the scene"
- c. "In service, leaving scene"
- d. "Returning to station"
- e. In quarters".

All apparatus should contact the dispatcher and should mark in route to the scene. The dispatcher shall acknowledge the apparatus, and shall for the first unit repeat the address of the incident location, and shall mark the time that the apparatus is in route. The dispatcher shall also mark (on the air) the times that all units arrive on the scene.

Each responding fire apparatus should transmit on the radio that they are "In route to (location)". The Dispatcher should again provide any necessary information to the responding unit, and if updated reports have been provided by units on the scene, the updated information should also be transmitted to the responding unit.

Section 6: Size-Up Information

The first arriving fire apparatus is responsible for making an actual size-up of the emergency situation. A size-up can be described as an evaluation of problems and conditions that affect the outcome of the fire or other emergency. All pertinent information regarding the size-up should be related to the dispatcher and all other incoming units.

A structure fire size-up may include a summary statement, which may include one of the following summary conditions:

- a. “Nothing showing”
- b. “Smoke showing”
- c. “Working fire”
- d. Fully involved”.

The size-up may also include the following areas of information:

- a. occupancy and life hazard;
- b. construction;
- c. height and area;
- d. location or extent of the fire or other problem;
- e. exposures;
- f. water supply;
- g. needed apparatus and manpower;
- h. needed auxiliary appliances;
- i. adverse weather conditions;
- j. street conditions;
- k. hazardous materials;
- l. the specific location of fire, or smoke condition, and probable areas of travel.

Dispatchers should repeat the size-up information to the unit making the report.

Section 7: Transmitting Other Operational Information

Where an officer or firefighter needs to convey additional information to the Dispatcher, he or she should first contact the dispatcher to make sure that the dispatcher is listening. Then, the fire officer or firefighter should proceed with his or her transmission. This transmission should be repeated by the dispatcher for confirmation.

All fire units should limit radio transmissions to only those which are necessary. Where possible, repetitive transmissions should be eliminated. For example, rather than having each apparatus call the radio to announce that they “are in route to the drill site”, one officer should simply mark all department units on the air for drill. The same procedure should take place when all units return to service following a drill.

Section 8: Initiating and Transferring Incident Command

The first arriving apparatus or officer on the scene shall initiate incident command. The firefighter or officer in charge of the apparatus will indicate that he or she is assuming command, and is to remain in command until such time as command is transferred (and assumed by) an officer of higher rank. That officer will indicate that he or she has arrived on the scene, and is assuming command. Acknowledgment of any change of command should be made to the radio dispatcher.

It is preferred that the dispatcher communicate with only one person on the fireground, that person being the incident commander. All other traffic to the dispatcher by persons on the fireground should be minimal or non-existent.

(i.e., “Chief 80 on the scene, assuming command”

Dispatcher: “Chief 80 on the scene and assuming command”.)

Because of the possibility of multiple incidents occurring at the same time, each command post should be identified as a specific command, using a street or business name. For example, “Chief 80 on the scene, establishing Main Street command”.

Section 9: Use of Fireground Frequencies

Upon reaching a scene or when complex or extended radio communications are required, a fireground frequency should be utilized by the department, fire officers, or firefighters. In absence or inability to use fireground frequencies, cellular phones or land line communications should be utilized.

Poland Fire Ground	-	154.070
Coitsville Fire Ground	-	154.280
New Middletown fire Ground	-	154.280
Struthers Fire Ground	-	153.830
Lowellville Fire Ground	-	153.830

Additionally, specific frequencies have been marked for certain operations in mutual aid responses. They are:

1.	State Fire Ground	-	153.83	(No PL)
2.	State Mutual Aid	-	154.28	(No PL)
3.	DSA/Hazmat	-	155.025/158.865	(178.8)

The S.F.G. channel is for use by mobile and portable radios actually on the fireground. This frequency is often set at one (1) watt output.

The S.M.A. channel is designed for multi-department mutual aid command and control, when everyone needs to hear plans/orders. This channel is often used for operations such as water shuttle.

The D.S.A. channel is a repeated channel. It is being recommended for executive level (or Chief to Chief) communications. It may also be used to coordinate multi-agency response.

Section 10: Benchmarks

Where the incident commander has indicated that there is smoke showing or a working fire, and fire department personnel will be active at the fire ground, a primary search is likely to be conducted. When a primary search has been conducted and completed, and all victims have been removed from the building or have been accounted for, the incident commander should indicate that the “primary search is complete”. The “primary search complete” signal should be acknowledged by the dispatcher.

When the forward progress of the fire has been stopped and the fire can be extinguished with the present resources on the fire ground, the incident commander should transmit the “situation under control” signal. Again, the “situation under control” signal does not necessarily mean that all fire is out, but rather the property conservation is not the central focus.

When the last department unit or apparatus is leaving an operation, he or she should transmit that the “operation is terminated”, “all department units clear from (address)” signal. If more than one (1) unit clears from the address at the same time, all units should be cleared from the scene by one radio transmission. Again, the transmission should be confirmed by the dispatcher.

Section 11: Personal Accountability Reports (PARs)

An essential part of any accountability system is a series of Personnel Accountability Reports (PARs). A PAR is the IC’s way of making sure that everyone is accounted for. PARs are accomplished by the IC contacting each person that he or she supervises. In turn, each supervisor checks with their crew leaders who account for their personnel. The presence or absence of all members is then communicated to the IC. This procedure is similar for any number of levels within the IMS.

PAR required benchmarks:

- a. Any report of a missing or trapped member;
- b. Any change from offensive to defensive operations;
- c. Any sudden hazardous event at the incident (e.g. collapse, flashover, backdraft, etc.);
- d. At 20 minute intervals throughout the incident (Announced by Dispatch);
- e. Before leaving the scene;
- f. Any other times that the IC requires.

Section 12: Emergency Traffic/Maydays

Where a unit observes an immediate perilous situation that may endanger firefighters, an immediate notification must be given to those firefighters in danger, communication shall be preceded with a term “emergency traffic”. The message following the “emergency traffic” alert

must be given the highest priority from the dispatch center, command, and all operating units. This use of the phrase “emergency traffic” may also be used in other situations where the immediate attention of the dispatcher is required.

Where applicable and possible, the announcement of emergency traffic shall be followed by the alarm of a P.A.S.S., or a high-low siren should come over the fireground radio frequency. This shall be immediately followed by the appropriate emergency traffic.

If the announcement requires more immediate evacuation of the fireground (i.e., in case of an imminent hazard condition), personnel shall be immediately evacuated from the area at risk. The method of notification shall include the simultaneous blast of apparatus air horns and announcements made, via portable radios, as set forth above.

Where a firefighter is in danger and must communicate that fact to the incident commander, he or she shall use the term “mayday” and shall provide pertinent information to the incident commander and/or dispatch center following the mayday notification. All other radio traffic shall cease immediately upon the receipt of the “mayday” signal. When a firefighter becomes trapped or otherwise in danger, all other radios being utilized shall be switched to a separate fireground frequency, so that uninterrupted communication may be had with the firefighter at risk or in danger.

Section 13: Mutual Aid Dispatching

When a department requests mutual aid from another jurisdiction who is a member to this agreement, the departmental dispatch center making a request may directly dispatch (tone out) the mutual aid departments. The mutual aid departments that respond to the call shall respond directly to the requesting department’s dispatch center, shall act as the sole dispatch center for that incident.

For example, if Coitsville requests the Western Reserve Joint Fire District to respond to a fire, Clemente base may tone out Poland directly, and all Poland fire units shall respond directly to Clemente base.

Immediately after dispatching all departments, the dispatch center shall telephone by land line, the other dispatch center to notify them that the fire department has been requested, and toned out, to respond. Verification of successful tone alerting should be made. If a receipt of a page cannot be verified, verification shall be confirmed after a second page.

Section 14: Storm Related Emergencies

In the event of a weather warning or alert issued by the National Weather Service for Mahoning County, any dispatcher may issue the warning for all department utilizing this frequency. The Dispatch Center should follow the separate severe weather protocol.

Firefighters should refrain from calling the dispatch centers with questions following an alert. Additional storm information may be obtained by monitoring Skywatch, DSA, or NWS

frequencies, or watching local television stations.

In the event of multiple emergencies occurring in several communities, dispatchers should dispatch the emergency call only, which will be acknowledged by an incident commander or other person designated by each department.

The department will then dispatch and track its own apparatus via a fireground channel. The dispatcher may be kept informed of the status of various incidents through periodic requests by the field command post. Cellular phones may be used, when available.

Section 15: Radio System Failure

In the event of a radio communication system failure at a dispatch center, Clemente base shall be the back-up system for Central Communications, and Central Communications shall be the back-up for Clemente base. The Mahoning County 911 dispatch center shall be notified accordingly at the time of the failure, directed to transfer incoming emergency calls accordingly. If both bases are out of service, Struthers Fire Department shall act as the back up.

If the repeater is down (meaning Channel 1 is out of service), a simplex channel should be utilized. If a simplex channel cannot be utilized by either Clemente or Central Communications, Struthers Fire Department should act as the back up.

The Struthers Fire Department may also serve as a back up for all departments' alpha pagers, in the event the radio system fails in its entirety.

Section 16: Unit Identification

To avoid unit/apparatus identity problems, apparatus, officers, and firefighters will be identified as the following:

Springfield	20's
Lowellville	30's
Coitsville	40's
Campbell	50's
New Middletown	60's
Boardman	70's
Struthers	80's
Western Reserve	90's
Beaver	100's

Apparatus and officers will utilize double digits and firefighters will be identified with triple digits. Firefighters may also be identified with their station number and two digit ID number (i.e. 92-56)

Each department will identify his or her station (base) utilizing the corresponding numbering system. Each stations' base radio should be referred to by that station number. For example, the

radio located at Western Reserve Fire Station #1 will be the "Station 91" radio.

The Dispatch Centers will be referred to as "Central Communication" for the Rural Metro, Western Reserve Joint Fire District and Lowellville, "Clemente Base" for Clemente, New Middletown and Coitsville.

Section 17: Daily Pager Test and Announcements

Daily pager test and announcements shall be conducted at the following times:

17:30 Struthers
17:45 Lowellville
18:00 WRJFD
18:15 New Middletown
18:30 Coitsville

The daily pager test and announcements shall generally follow the following format:

Pager Test - _____ [Set fire and EMS tones] "This is a test of the Fire and EMS paging systems for the _____."

Clemente Base shall activate all pager tests for Poland, New Middletown, and Coitsville each Saturday at 18:30 hours. Central communications shall activate all pager test for Poland, new Middletown, and Coitsville each Sunday at 18:00 hours. Any department requiring special announcements to be made shall provide them to the dispatch center in advance.

All announcements should be as brief as possible. Announcements may be repeated twice. Daily or weekly radio test of portable or mobile radios should not be conducted until after Coitsville has completed its pager test.

Conclusion:

All personnel utilizing base, mobile or portable radios are reminded that the radio transmissions are used to convey important information. "Communication" is defined as an exchange of information. In the fire service, listening is more important than talking. By reducing radio traffic to pertinent information, communicating becomes more efficient. Think before speaking. Broadcast messages whose meanings are specific and important. By using these proper communication skills throughout the emergency scene, the risk of injury or death to firefighting personnel can be reduced and the safety of all personnel can be protected.

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