



STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE 07-004

Policy Name: Fire Ground Emergency Communication

Issued: 07/01/2009

CALEA Standard(s):

1.0 - PROCEDURE APPLIES TO

All-Employees Operations Administration Technology

2.0 - PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish clear expectations when using emergency signals and terminology. It is imperative that NORCOM personnel, Fire and EMS agencies interpret urgent announcements, declarations and broadcasts the same way. For that purpose, all NORCOM Fire and EMS agencies shall utilize dedicated, standardized emergency signals and terminology, especially when responder safety is at stake.

3.0 - EMERGENCY EGRESS - ABANDON / WITHDRAW / EVACUATE

- **3.1 ABANDON:** (with Tones) - In the event a building requires abandonment, the I/C shall announce *“Emergency Traffic”* over the tactical channel with specific instructions to abandon the building immediately.
 - **3.1.1** The I/C will reiterate that the structure, portion of the structure, or a specific hazard area must be abandoned.
 - Example *“Emergency Traffic - All Units at XXXXXXXX from Command; Abandon the building immediately!”*
 - **3.1.2** This command will be repeated two additional times by the I/C (for a total of three), followed by a request to NORCOM to transmit the Abandonment Tone over the air.
 - **3.1.3** Upon receipt of an abandonment order from the I/C, the Dispatcher shall activate the *“High / Low”* abandonment tones on the assigned tactical talk group. (Driver/Operators at the scene will initiate their air horn alerts at this time).
 - **3.1.4** NORCOM will announce the abandonment message as received from the IC on the tactical frequency and all other appropriate frequencies. The Dispatcher will repeat the transmission two additional times (for a total of three).
 - **3.1.5** Firefighters may have to continue operation of hose lines to protect lives and effect a safe abandoned operation.

- **3.1.6** NORCOM will close the tactical frequency so it is restricted for emergency radio traffic related to the abandonment. Units will maintain restricted radio traffic to facilitate completion of the roll call.
- **3.1.7** The I/C will conduct roll call.
- **3.1.8** To conclude the “Abandonment”, the I/C shall transmit an “all clear,” to resume normal traffic on all assigned radio channels.
- **3.2 WITHDRAW:** (without Tones) - In the event a building requires withdrawal, the I/C shall: Broadcast the order to withdraw from the building and request a PAR from companies on their exit.
 - **3.2.1** The order to withdraw, as opposed to the order to abandon is given only when there is no imminent risk to firefighters.
 - **3.2.2** Firefighters generally should exit as a company or team with all hose, tools and equipment.
 - **3.2.3** NORCOM shall repeat this request only if asked to do so. Abandonment tones will not be imposed.
 - **3.2.4** To conclude the “Withdrawal”, the I/C should transmit an “all clear,” to resume normal traffic on all assigned radio channels.
- **3.3 EVACUATE:** - The organized and supervised withdrawal, dispersal, or removal of civilians from dangerous or potentially dangerous areas, and their reception and care in safe areas.
 - **3.3.1 ROUTINE EVACUATION** This term shall be used in reference to civilians departing from a hazardous zone or structure in an orderly fashion.
 - (e.g. “Dispatch from Battalion 1, I have arrived at the AFA. Evacuation in progress”)
 - **3.3.2 EMERGENCY EVACUATION ORDERS:** - A tiered system that communicates the need for an urgent, immediate egress or escape of people away from an area that contains an imminent threat, an ongoing threat or hazard to lives or property.
 - **3.3.2.1** Only the highest elected official, such as the County Executive, a Mayor of a city, or their designee has the authority to order an Emergency Evacuation.
 - **3.3.2.2** This decision is made in conjunction with the on-scene I/C.
 - **3.3.2.3** An evacuation order cannot be mandatory under Washington State law, but can be highly recommended.
 - **3.3.2.4** Unified Command shall be established with local law enforcement.
 - **3.3.2.5** In most cases, law enforcement will be the primary agency responsible for evacuation.
 - **3.3.2.6** ICS will be used to manage evacuation activities and phases at all levels.
 - **3.3.2.7** If a Company Officer makes a request for NORCOM to send a LEVEL 1, 2 or 3 Evacuation Order to the public:
 - **3.3.2.7.1** NORCOM will relay the request to the Sheriff’s Office as they are the lead agency responsible for conducting evacuations and notifications within the County and its contracted cities.
 - **3.3.2.7.2** NORCOM will request a dual response, so both police and fire can further coordinate in person at the command post.

4.0 - EMERGENCY SIGNALS - MAYDAY / FIREFIGHTER NEEDS HELP / CODE BLUE

- **4.1 MAYDAY:**
 - **4.1.1** A “MAYDAY” radio transmission shall be given on the assigned tactical talk group.

- Example: "MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY, Command FROM Engine 1"
 - **4.1.2** The Mayday transmission may originate from the firefighter(s) in need of assistance themselves or by anyone that suspects there are missing or trapped firefighter(s).
 - **4.1.3** The distress call benefits everyone on the assigned frequency, but is specifically intended for the I/C to acknowledge.
 - **4.1.4** All radio transmissions are to be acknowledged. Under no circumstances should a "Mayday" call ever go unanswered. The dispatcher will immediately maintain radio silence allowing the I/C the opportunity to respond. NORCOM will only repeat the Mayday, if it quickly becomes apparent that the I/C did not copy the MAYDAY.
 - **4.1.5** Once acknowledged by Command, the Mayday shall be followed by a report to include (if known) crew or personnel identification, location, conditions, air, and needs. Number of firefighters missing or trapped, extent of help needed (trapped, lost, missing, etc.) and the quickest/recommended ingress to their location.
 - **4.1.6** Dispatch will request an additional alarm.
 - **4.1.7** Once the Mayday is mitigated/resolved, the IC shall conduct roll call or PAR as appropriate.
 - **4.1.8** At the conclusion of the "mayday" or the "emergency traffic" incident, the I/C should transmit an "all clear," to resume normal traffic on all assigned radio channels.
 - Note: When on a Task Force or Strike Team, unit identifiers should include the Zone designator (e.g., Engine 10-01, Engine 30-71, Engine 50-17).
- **4.2 FIREFIGHTER NEEDS HELP:**
 - **4.2.1** A request stated in this manner will assume:
 - **4.2.1.1** Firefighters are involved in a disturbance where weapons are present,
 - **4.2.1.2** There is an imminent threat, or threats are being made such that police assistance is needed immediately.
 - **4.2.2** The fire dispatcher assigned to the associated FTAC channel will immediately check the city to determine the appropriate law enforcement agency to respond.
 - **4.2.2.1** If the police agency is in NORCOM's jurisdiction, the fire dispatcher handling the incident will create a priority 1 police incident for a "Firefighter Needs Help" call.
 - **4.2.2.2** If the police agency is outside of NORCOM's jurisdiction, and within King County, the fire dispatcher handling the incident will raise the appropriate agency on the PSAP channel, advising them this is a "Firefighter Needs Help" call.
 - **4.2.2.3** The secondary fire dispatcher will immediately call the appropriate PSAP to relay the details of the "Firefighter Needs Help" call. This will be the sole way to reach SNO911 for "Firefighter Needs Help" calls in Woodway and Unincorporated Snohomish County.
 - **4.2.3** The Fire Dispatcher shall assign the impacted department's supervisor onto the call.
 - **4.2.4** NORCOM will close the tactical frequency so it is restricted to emergency radio traffic only. Dispatchers involved in an incident on a closed talk group will keep their transmissions brief and relevant.
 - **4.2.5** NORCOM will direct all unrelated Fire Units on that frequency to switch to a different channel. No other radio traffic, except pertinent information related to the associated incident, should be transmitted on the talk group.
 - **4.2.6** At the conclusion of the incident, the I/C should transmit an "all clear," to resume normal traffic on all assigned radio channels.
 - **4.3 CODE BLUE:** - A covert synonym for "Firefighter Needs Help."
 - **4.3.1** This phrase allows a field unit to notify the fire dispatcher during a routine transmission, that they are in extreme duress without signaling the aggressor.
 - **4.3.2** The fire dispatcher assigned to the associated FTAC channel will immediately check

the city to determine the appropriate law enforcement agency to respond.

- **4.3.2.1** If the police agency is in NORCOM's jurisdiction, the fire dispatcher handling the incident will create a priority 1 police incident for a "Firefighter Needs Help" call.
- **4.3.2.2** If the police agency is outside of NORCOM's jurisdiction, and within King County, the fire dispatcher handling the incident will raise the appropriate agency on the PSAP channel, advising them this is a "Firefighter Needs Help" call.
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- **4.3.5** NORCOM will direct all unrelated Fire Units on that frequency to switch to a different channel. No other radio traffic, except pertinent information related to the associated incident, should be transmitted on the talk group.

5.0 - EMERGENCY ACTIVATION (EMER)

- **5.1 AN EMERGENCY ACTIVATION "EMER":** button is an alternative notification method during times of distress and is only to be used as a last resort or when voice communication is not possible or effective.
 - **5.1.1** If the EMER button is activated, it will immediately switch the user over to a dedicated frequency (the EMER talk group) monitored by the communications center handling the incident the radio is assigned to.
 - **5.1.2** NORCOM is required to promptly attempt to establish radio contact with the identified user of that portable.
 - **5.1.3** NORCOM will also immediately notify the I/C (or the Battalion Chief if no incident is in progress) of the EMER alert.
 - **5.1.4** The I/C can declare a mayday, for any activation of an EMER which is not immediately confirmed as false by NORCOM.
 - **5.1.4.1** If this declaration occurs, refer to section 4.1.
 - Note: The EMER button will not work when the radio is on a Simplex channel (State-Ops), when the radio is out of range of the 800 MHz system, or when the 800 MHz system is in site-trunking or failsoft mode.

6.0 - TRAFFIC LEVELS

- **6.1 EMERGENCY TRAFFIC:** - When a member declares "emergency traffic" that person shall use clear text to identify the type of emergency, and change in conditions / tactical operations.
 - e.g. "evacuate the building" - "wind shift from North to South" - "change from offensive to defensive operations" - "electrical wires down" or "shots fired."
- **6.2 PRIORITY TRAFFIC:** - Radio communications that could alter the incident action plan, usually considered bad news.

- e.g. “uncontrolled fire in a concealed space” - “victim found” - “high heat” - “unable to complete assignment.
 - **6.3 ROUTINE TRAFFIC::** - Normal fire ground communications that include orders, progress reports, initial radio reports and command transmissions.
 - **6.4 RESTRICTED TRAFFIC (CLOSED AIR):** - Mayday, Firefighter Needs Help and Code Blue are all examples of mandatory air closures for Fire/EMS with no channel markers.
 - **6.4.1** The decision to designate a closed or restricted talk group (no tones) is based upon the necessity for responding officers to have immediate access to a clear talk group
 - **6.4.2** A closed air or restricted traffic only condition can be designated by the Communications Center, primary assigned units on the call, a supervisor, or command officer.
 - **6.4.3** Unless otherwise instructed, officers assigned to the incident will remain on the primary operational talk group and all other officers will be assigned to a secondary talk group.
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7.0 - FD/PD COMMUNICATION / PLAIN LANGUAGE

- **7.1 PLAIN LANGUAGE REQUESTS:** - When a police response is needed at the scene of a fire or medical incident, the request should be made by the unit on scene in plain language and should include the reason police are needed (e.g. traffic or crowd control, uncooperative/combatative patient, liaison at the Command Post, etc.)
 - **7.1.1** A **PRIORITY 3 POLICE CALL** will be created if in NORCOM's jurisdiction. (**Typically a two officer response**). If the incident is not within our police response area, contact will be made with the proper PSAP without delay. NORCOM will relay the reason our units have provided for the request.
 - Example - “Dispatch from LF3, can we get PD for an uncooperative patient?”
 - **7.1.1.2** Non-emergency/priority 4 responses should only be created if the unit specifically requests a non-emergency response (APS/CPS referral, malicious fire alarm pull, arson, etc.)
 - Example - “Dispatch from E66, can we get PD non-emergency for a malicious pull.”
 - **7.1.2** In either case, Police shall be requested as soon as possible following Fire's request.
 - **7.1.2.1** If there are no units presently available, e.g. shift change, tied up on other emergency calls, the requestor should be promptly advised of the delay. If necessary, the requestor shall communicate any deviation from the original request back to the dispatcher.
 - Example - “Go ahead and cancel Police.”
- **7.2 POLICE (PD) BACKUP:** - If the unit requests “police backup”, it is assumed they are in a situation that is urgent or serious, but not life threatening or are under conditions where giving the reason for police could potentially escalate the situation.
 - **7.2.1** A **PRIORITY 3 POLICE CALL** will be created if in NORCOM's jurisdiction. (**Typically a two officer response**). If the incident is not within our police response area, contact will be made with the proper PSAP without delay. NORCOM will relay the reason our units have provided for the request.
 - **7.2.2** If another PSAP inquires if a code response is necessary, dispatch can relay the reason our units have provided for the request, clarifying that this is not believed to be a Firefighter Needs Help situation.
- **7.3 CLEAR TO COPY:** - This phrase will be used by Dispatch to hail both Fire and Police when

sensitive information exists and needs to be relayed to units already on scene.

- **7.3.1** After asking if a unit is “Clear to Copy,” Dispatch will wait for an acknowledgment from the Police/Fire unit to go ahead.
- **7.3.2** If Fire is in a delicate situation and are unable to speak freely, they can say, “I’m not clear to copy”.
 - **7.3.2.1** The field unit(s) shall advise, once they have moved beyond earshot of the patient / subject to safely receive the message.
 - Example: DISPATCH: “E1 from Dispatch, are you clear to copy?”
 - E1: “Go ahead!”
 - DISPATCH: “A premise alert indicates your diabetic patient has a history of being combative with the aid crew. We have started PD to your location.”
 - **7.3.2.2** If crews are unable to step away from the subject to communicate, they should consider one of the other methods described in section 4.0.

8.0 - INCIDENT MARKERS

- **8.1 INCIDENT CLOCK:** NORCOM shall start an incident clock using the first arriving unit's on scene time as the point of reference on “Working” Incidents, Cardiac Arrests, Hazardous Materials Incidents, Rescues, upon I/C request, or other conditions deemed to be time sensitive or dangerous.
 - **8.1.1** The dispatch center shall notify the incident commander at every 10-minute increment with the time that resources have been on the incident (e.g., incident clock is 10, 20, or 30 minutes).
 - **8.1.2** The timer will continue until the fire is knocked down, the incident becomes static (patient is extricated, unit is transporting, etc.), or the timer is cancelled by the I/C.
- **8.2 COLOR FLAGGING:** A method used by first responders to prioritize patients for triage, treatment and transport.
 - **8.2.1 GREEN:** Those with minor injuries - Not requiring urgent care.
 - **8.2.2 YELLOW:** Those with less severe injuries - Transport can be delayed.
 - **8.2.3 RED:** Those with severe injuries - Transport should be rapid.
 - **8.2.4 STRIPED:** Those that are deceased.

9.0 - DEFINITIONS

- **9.1 ABANDON (With Tones):** An immediate and rapid exit from the hazardous zone or structure. This may require sacrificing or discarding equipment to facilitate the immediate and rapid exit. Firefighters should make every effort to exit as a team. This request will come from the IC.
- **9.2 CLEAR TO COPY:** This is the preferred method to inform field units that dispatch has delicate information they are waiting to transmit. The intent of the dispatcher asking if the unit is “Clear to Copy”, is so that the receiving Police/Fire unit may make adjustments to their situation if needed, in order to receive the confidential or sensitive information without alerting the subjects involved.
- **9.3 CODE BLUE:** A covert synonym for “Firefighter Needs Help”. Start a **Priority 1 Police** call. Large scale response with Lights and Sirens. Call is typically broadcasted to surrounding PSAPs.

Equivalent to an “Officer in a fight” - “Shots Fired” or “Officer Needs Help response. This should only be utilized when using plain language over the air puts units in increased danger.

- **9.4 EMERGENCY ACTIVATION (EMER):** Each portable radio is equipped with an emergency button to alert all users on the network of an emergency. All radios with the trunked radio system transmit a unique radio identifier (ID) on each push to talk (PTT). The ID appears on each radio that is set to the same talk group as well as the Dispatcher’s console. The emergency button is to be used as a last resort.
- **9.5 EMERGENCY TRAFFIC:** Announced over the radio, indicating that a message involving firefighter safety is about to be communicated.
- **9.6 EVACUATION:** This term refers to the removal of civilians from a hazardous zone or structure. Examples range from the small-scale evacuation of a building due to a storm or fire to the large-scale evacuation of a city because of a flood, bombardment or approaching weather system. In situations involving hazardous materials or possible contamination, evacuees may be decontaminated prior to being transported out of the contaminated area.
- **9.7 EVACUATION ORDERS:** The urgent immediate egress or escape of people away from an area that contains an imminent threat, an ongoing threat or a hazard to lives or property.
 - **9.7.1 Evacuation ALERT (Level 1):** A protective evacuation ALERT has been issued for this area. Persons are warned that current or projected threats from hazards associated with the approaching (HAZMAT, flood, etc) are severe.
 - **9.7.2 Evacuation REQUEST (Level 2):** An evacuation REQUEST has been issued for this area. Events dictate a good probability that hazards associated with the approaching (HAZMAT, flood, etc) will severely limit our ability to provide emergency services protection. Dangerous conditions exist that may threaten residents or businesses.
 - **9.7.3 Evacuation ORDER (Level 3):** An evacuation ORDER has been issued for this area. Current conditions present specific and immediate threat(s) to the life and safety of persons within this area.
- **9.8 FIREFIGHTER NEEDS HELP:** A request stated in this manner will assume: Firefighters are involved in a disturbance where weapons are present, there is an imminent threat, or threats are being made such that police assistance is needed immediately. Start a **Priority 1 Police** call. Large scale response with Lights and Sirens. Call is typically broadcasted to surrounding PSAPs. Equivalent to an “Officer in a fight” - “Shots Fired” or “Officer Needs Help response.
- **9.9 MAYDAY:** A single word distress call, made three times (“Mayday, Mayday, Mayday”) to indicate that a firefighter/unit is in immediate danger, presumed missing, trapped, disoriented, lost, separated, or in serious trouble and requires immediate assistance.
- **9.10 PERSONNEL ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT (PAR).** When requested by the I/C, each Division or group supervisor shall provide a single status report, verifying all personnel operating within their division are safely accounted for.
- **9.11 PLAIN LANGUAGE** - Unless crews are unable to speak freely, of a fire or medical incident, the request should be made by the unit on scene in plain language and should include the reason police are needed (e.g. traffic or crowd control, uncooperative/combatative patient, liaison at the Command Post, etc.)
- **9.12 REQUESTING POLICE (PD) BACKUP:** Used when a situation is urgent or serious, but not life threatening. Also under conditions when giving the reason or could potentially escalate the situation. Start a **Priority 3 Police** call. Usually two or more officers responding with lights and sirens. These calls are dispatched without delay.

- **9.13 PRIORITY TRAFFIC:** Radio communications that could alter the incident action plan, usually considered bad news; e.g. uncontrolled fire in a concealed space, victim found, high heat, and unable to complete assignment.
- **9.14 ROLL CALL:** - An accountability report from all company officers of an individual crew assigned to the hazard zone, or Division or Group supervisors reporting on all personnel working in a specific geographical area of the hazard zone at one specific area in the incident. This request will come from and be handled by the IC.
- **9.15 ROUTINE TRAFFIC** Normal fire ground communications that include orders, progress reports, initial radio reports and command transfers.
- **9.16 SHELTER IN PLACE:** Isolation of a population within a structure to protect them from an airborne hazardous materials release.
- **9.17 WITHDRAW (No Tones):** A planned or orderly withdrawal/removal of firefighters from the hazardous zone or structure.

10.0 - REFERENCES

- **10.1** NFPA 1500 8.2.4.1 Incident Clock
- **10.2** NFPA 72 NFA and Signaling Code
- **10.3** NFPA 1561 6.3.3.2 Mayday
- **10.4** WAC 296-305 Safety Standards for Firefighters
- **10.5** King County Fire Model Procedures: 6,10,11,12,15,16,18
- **10.6** NIMS 12-06 Alert Memorandum
- **10.7** King County Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP)

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