



# Carroll County Department of Fire & EMS

<b>Standard Operating Procedure: 4.05</b>	<b>Effective Date: September 30, 2023</b>
<b>Subject: Fireground Communications Procedures</b>	<b>Section: Fire Rescue Ops</b>
<b>Authorized: Chief Michael Robinson, Director</b>	<b>Revision Date: N/A</b>

## I. PURPOSE

This document will cover policies and procedures that govern voice and data communications for the Carroll County Department of Fire & EMS. While used as a standard to save time and maximize efficiency, it is not intended to cover every situation encountered. This document will adhere to NFPA, NIMS and local standards.

## II. DEFINITIONS

**Working Fire**- The term “Working Fire” indicates a situation that will require the commitment of all responding companies. This report advises Communications that the companies will be engaged in tactical activities and will be held at the scene for an extended period of time.

**Water on fire**- indicates that the attack line or lines are in operation and have begun extinguishment.

**Primary All Clear**- indicates the completion of the primary search and that no victims were located.

**Water Supply Established**- indicates a continuous water supply to the fire attack engine is established off of a hydrant or rural water supply.

**Fire under control**- will be transmitted when the main body of fire has been extinguished and all seven sides of the fire have been confirmed as having no fire extension (or when extension has been controlled) in an assigned unit’s geographic / operational area.

**Fire Out**- indicates all visible fire is out.

**Utilities Controlled**- indicates all utilities, e.g., gas, electric, have been shut off.

**Priority Traffic Reports-** priority information needed to be conveyed to command such as Unable to complete a critical assigned task/tactical objective, Urgent need to be reinforced/backed-up to complete an assigned task/tactical objective, Victims encountered, working concealed space fires not easily controlled by the locating unit, sudden, significant incident events

### **III. FORMS OF COMMUNICATION**

Face to face communication is the most effective form of communication. It should be the preferred form of communication on the incident. Face to face communication should be used whenever possible in the following circumstances:

- Unit officers communicating with their crew members.
- Unit officers communicating with other unit officers in their work area
- Division / Group Supervisor communicating with units assigned to their geographic location

The entire purpose of placing an Incident Commander in a command post is to create the best possible communication environment. In the command post, the Incident Commander can more effectively monitor and control radio communications. All members working on the fireground will avoid distracting the Incident Commander with face-to-face communications.

### **IV. GEAR COMMUNICATIONS TOWARD COMPLETING THE TACTICAL BENCHMARKS**

Communications should focus on the completion of the tactical priorities and firefighter safety. This will help keep communications short, to the point and effective. It also leaves airtime free for important tactical messages that affect everybody working in the hazard zone. When the IC properly assigns Engine 7-1 to: “Lay a supply line to the Alpha side, stretch an attack line to the interior of the Delta 1 exposure for a primary search and check for fire extension. I’m going to make you Delta,” it becomes the basis for Engine 7-1 to structure their CAN report back to command. “Delta to Command, we have a primary all-clear in Delta 1, we have opened the ceilings and have a working attic fire. We are applying water and opening more ceilings. We’ll need another company to assist in Delta 1 with fire control in the attic space.”

### **V. USE THE ORGANIZATION CHART AS A COMMUNICATIONS FLOW PLAN**

Dividing the incident scene into Divisions / Groups has a positive effect on the communications process. When the IC assigns division / group supervisor responsibilities to the officers initially assigned to the different key tactical positions, it starts to manage their span of control and enhances the entire communications process. This should be completed as soon as reasonable.

Divisions/Groups should be established prior to an Operations Section. The Operations Section should be reserved to resolve span of control issues and not to complicate them. Typically, an IC should be able to successfully manage five divisions/groups. Once that span of control is exceeded consideration should be given to establishing branches. Examples could include a suppression branch, an exposure branch, a haz mat branch, a medical branch or others as determined by the incident specifics. Branches will be managed by a branch director which should typically be a chief officer. Consideration should be made early in an incident to expand talkgroups as needed. The presence of a

command assistant/adjunct will greatly enhance the ICs ability to manage escalation and/or complex incidents.

In cases where the IC has not implemented/assigned division / group officers, they will have to communicate directly with each individual unit assigned to the incident scene. Any time there are two or more units working in the same geographically area, Command should designate one of the units the geographic supervisor (Division) and all communications from that area will be from the Division supervisor to the IC.

Division / Group supervisors will communicate with their assigned companies over the radio or face-to-face depending on their proximity to one another. Preferably, face to face. The Division / Group officer will communicate with the IC over the tactical talkgroup.

Individual units, once assigned to a division or group shall only communicate within that division or group. An exception would be an emergent situation that requires the necessity to communicate with safety or command. This should not routinely occur. The Division/Group supervisor must continuously monitor their assigned units for radio traffic.

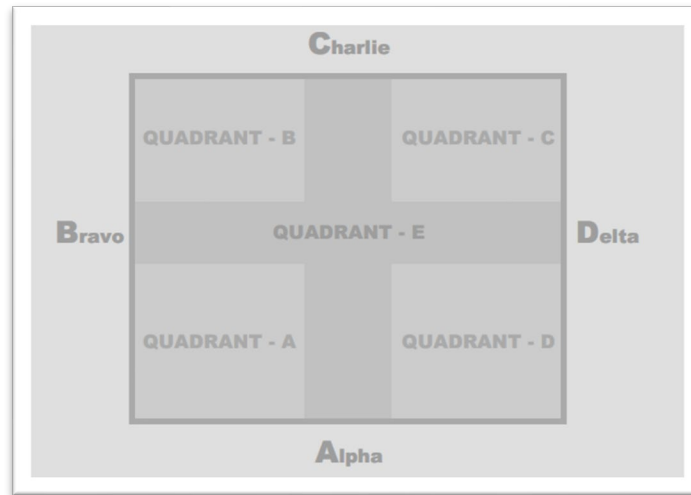
## **VI. UTILIZE THE STANDARD ORDER MODEL**

The order model outlines the communications steps we follow to ensure messages are always received and understood despite the rushed, confusing and dangerous conditions we typically face during operations. The order model also standardizes how the incident's participants will exchange two-way radio communications. The order model's required steps are:

- A. When the sender is ready to transmit a message, they call the receiver to determine if they are ready to receive the message; (i.e. Engine 9-1 from Command)
- B. The receiver then acknowledges the sender; (i.e. Engine 9-1)
- C. When the sender receives the readiness reply, they can transmit the message;
- D. The receiver then gives a brief restatement of the message to acknowledge the receipt of the message; (i.e. "Engine 9-1 COPIES, Stage on Main St.")
- E. The sender restates the message if misunderstood.

**VII. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS**

Sides of a building will be described as:



Exposures will be described as:

EXP B3	EXP B2	EXP B1	EXP B	FIRE BLDG	EXP D	EXP D1	EXP D2	EXP D3

Floors are identified by stories above and below ground level:

<b>Floor 4 – Division 4</b>
<b>Floor 3 – Division 3</b>
<b>Floor 2 – Division 2</b>
<b>Floor 1 – Division 1</b>
<b>Sub-Floor 1 – Sub-Division 1</b>
<b>Sub-Floor 2 – Sub-Division 2</b>

**VIII. TACTICAL BENCHMARKS**

The following benchmarks shall be communicated over the fireground talk group:

“Water on fire” indicates that the attack line or lines are in operation and have begun extinguishment.

“Primary All Clear” indicates the completion of the primary search and that no victims were located.

“Water Supply Established” indicates a continuous water supply to the fire attack engine is established off of a hydrant or rural water supply.

“Fire under control” will be transmitted when the main body of fire has been extinguished and all seven sides of the fire have been confirmed as having no fire extension (or when extension has been controlled) in an assigned unit’s geographic / operational area. The fire under control benchmark report represents a major shift in the overall focus of the operation going from a water application to a focus on ventilating the structure followed by secondary searches.

“Fire Out” indicates all visible fire is out.

“Utilities Controlled” indicates all utilities, e.g., gas, electric, have been shut off.

## **IX. PRIORITY TRAFFIC REPORTS**

Once a unit is assigned into the hazard zone, they should maintain radio silence, and wait to be contacted by the IC. The following are examples of the ONLY instances where a unit can break radio silence. These transmissions should be structured as Priority Traffic reports, e.g., “Command from Delta – Priority Traffic.” and they MUST be transmitted as soon as the information is obtained:

- Unable to complete a critical assigned task/tactical objective
- Urgent need to be reinforced/backed-up to complete an assigned task/tactical objective
- Victims encountered
- Working concealed space fires not easily controlled by the locating unit
- A roof report that includes: attic fire, unsafe roof structure, eminent collapse threat
- Sudden, significant incident events (flashover, back draft, collapse)

All Priority traffic reports are to be direct to and acknowledge by the IC.

## **X. EMERGENCY TRAFFIC (COMMAND RESTRICTED)**

Emergency traffic should only be used for true emergencies.

The IC is the only person who can initiate an emergency traffic report. Companies operating in and around the hazard zone will contact the IC with priority traffic reports and the IC will determine the need for a COMMAND RESTRICTED talkgroup. When COMMAND RESTRICTED is given, the IC will contact Communications directly to initiate the report. Once COMMAND RESTRICTED has been requested, Communications will immediately activate the emergency traffic tones and announce that the talkgroup is now COMMAND RESTRICTED.

Example

IC, “Main St. Command to Carroll, make this talkgroup COMMAND RESTRICTED”

- Carroll sounds the emergency traffic tones
- Carroll, “Go ahead with your emergency traffic Command”
- IC, “Main St. Command to all units, we are going defensive on this structure. All units operating in the fire structure, exit the structure and standby for PAR’s.”
- Carroll sounds the emergency traffic tones
- Carroll, “Carroll to all units this talkgroup is now command restricted.”

Once the situation that caused the emergency traffic has been mitigated, e.g., PAR’s obtained, power shut off, the IC should contact Carroll and clear the

Command Restricted talkgroup with a brief report stating why. Example: “Carroll from Command”, “Go ahead Command”, “Command to all units 456 Main St. all units have exited the structure with PAR’s. Command is clearing COMMAND RESTRICTED and will remain in the defensive strategy. All Units return to routine radio traffic”.

## **XI. PROCEDURES**

### **A. General Guidelines**

1. Ensure Radio Discipline during emergency incidents. It is incumbent upon members while transmitting on radios to be brief, concise, and clear, in all communications. Members are reminded we are guided under FCC communications rules and should familiarize themselves as such.
2. When units are dispatched to an incident, the mobile radio shall be used and units shall announce enroute with staffing level on A1 Main. The dispatcher will acknowledge the transmission and have the unit switch to the appropriate response talkgroup.
3. Once a unit switches to the appropriate response talkgroup, no voice transmission will occur unless special instructions are needed to be relayed such as layout or water supply.
4. The **first-arriving unit** will push arrived on the MTD and follow-up with a verbal transmission on assigned fireground talkgroup:
  - Arriving on the scene
  - Transmit an Initial On Scene Report (IOSR) including structure type, conditions encountered, action(s) taken, declare strategy (offensive vs. defensive and assume command of the incident following the **Incident Management Policy Guidelines**

*Examples:*

*For an offensive structure fire - Engine 141 to Carroll - "Engine 141 is on the scene of a large two-story school with a working fire on the second floor. Engine 141 is laying a supply line and going in with a hand-line to the second floor for search & rescue and fire attack. This is an offensive fire attack. Engine 141 will be Old Liberty Road Command."*

*For a defensive fire - Engine 123 to Carroll - "Engine 123 is on the scene of a medium size warehouse fully involved with exposures to the east. Engine 123 is laying a supply line and attacking the fire with a deck gun and a hand-line to the east exposure to check for extension. This is a defensive fire. Engine 123 will be Enterprise Command."*

*For an E.M.S. incident – Truck 1 to Carroll - "Truck 1 is on the scene with a multi-vehicle accident. Give me the balance of an EMS Taskforce. Truck 1 will be Rt. 70 Command."*

5. All other units arriving at the incident location will activate the appropriate status on the units Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) if equipped. “Arrived”, “Tactical Staging”, “Staging Level 1”, “Staging Level 2”, “Staging Water Source” No voice transmission is required unless the unit is not equipped with an MDT. In that case a verbal transmission will be made announcing the unit ID “arrived”.

6. Upon arrival, units will assume the appropriate level of staging as directed by command or assume the appropriate roles and responsibilities as dictated by the **Structural Firefighting Policy**. Verbal radio transmissions requesting unit assignments are unnecessary and should be limited. Face to Face communications should be utilized if not assigned a role by policy.
7. All hazard zone transmissions shall be carried out on one (1) tactical radio frequency. Some incidents may require the use of multiple radio frequencies to support operations outside of the hazard zone, e.g., Level 2 staging, Water Supply, Rehab, Safety, Planning, Logistics. Each additional talkgroup activated for the incident must have a dedicated person assigned to manage that talkgroup at all times. The IC must only be responsible for the operation of one (1) tactical radio frequency while an active hazard zone exists.
8. Always end every CAN report with a NEED assessment (or with “No Needs”).
9. Only communicate information on the tactical talkgroup that pertains to the completion of the tactical priorities and firefighter safety.
10. Should the Operations Section be established the IC is to no longer communicate with Divisions/Groups or individual units reporting under operations.

## B. CLEAR TERMINOLOGY

Term or Phrase	Definition	Example
“Did not copy”	Used when transmission was not received clearly	“Truck 1 to Communications, I DID NOT COPY?”
“(Company or Unit) copies”	Used to acknowledge message received	“Engine 43 COPIES, Stage on Main St.”
“Affirmative”	Yes	“Engine 31, AFFIRMATIVE”
“Negative”	No	“Engine 61 to Command, NEGATIVE”
“En route” with staffing level	responding to assigned emergency	“Truck 2 is En route with 4”
“Out of Service, Clean-up”	Indicates a unit or company is not able to respond for Clean-up reasons	“Ladder 5 is OUT OF SERVICE, Clean-up”
“Out of Service, Repairs”	Indicates a unit or company is not able to respond for mechanical reasons	“Engine 121 is OUT OF SERVICE, REPAIRS”
“Available on Radio”	Indicates a unit is “In Service” but intends to be out of the station on official business.	“Medic 39 is AVAILABLE”
“In Service”	Indicates a unit is able to respond to incidents	“Battalion 1 IN SERVICE”
“Arrived”	Indicates a unit has arrived at an assigned incident	“Engine 61 is ARRIVED...”

“In Quarters”	Indicates a unit is back at the station in service	“Engine 71 IN QUARTERS”
“Primary All Clear”	Used to indicate initial search for victims inside structure is complete and no victims were located	“Main Street Command to communications, we have a PRIMARY ALL CLEAR”
“Secondary All Clear”	Used to indicate that a final, more thorough search for victims is complete and no victims were located	“Main Street Command to dispatch, we have a SECONDARY ALL CLEAR”
“Situation Under Control”	Indicates that incident stabilization has occurred	“Main Street Command to communications, SITUATION UNDER CONTROL”
“Fire Out”	Indicates final extinguishment of fire is complete and all operations, except investigation, are finished	“Main Street Command to Communications, FIRE OUT”
“Staging or Staged”	Placement of apparatus or personnel for deployment in either Tactical, Level 1 or Level 2 fashion	“Medic 1 is STAGED at 400 North Main Street”
“Return to Service”	Directed towards apparatus that are not needed at an incident scene and can return to quarters	“Main Street Command to Engine 4, you can RETURN TO SERVICE”

### C. MOBILE DATA TERMINALS (MTD)

1. Fire Mobile shall be restarted once a day to receive any updates.
2. Immediately upon shift commencement the oncoming crews shall ensure that the MDT’s are working and that it displays Available Mobile (AM).
3. Enroute – Responding units will status the unit enroute and document how many personnel are on board. Units will then announce verbally on MAIN that they are responding.
4. Once on the TAC talk groups unit will not verbally respond. Units will use the MDT to status Arrive (AR). Units will verbally transmit important information such as on scene reports, hydrant locations, etc.
5. Units clearing the scene shall status the unit Available on Radio (AOV)
6. Transport Status (TR) Once the patient is provided with initial medical care, moved into the ambulance and is ready for transport, the EMS Crew will status Transport (TR). The EMS crew will select their transportation destination from the MDT screen and will remain in this status until they reach their destination.
7. Apparatus equipped with MDTs are strongly encouraged to transmit status messages; this insures the most accurate times are being kept by the field users.



8. The requests and remarks submitted via MDT are considered a part of a legal document and can be legally discovered at the request of records.

#### **D. PROGRESS REPORTS**

During active firefighting operations, Command will provide Communications with regular progress reports or whenever significant tactical plans are changed or unusual situations are encountered. The first progress report should be given after initial action has been implemented and should include the correct address and an improved description of the building and fire conditions if the arrival report was incomplete.

#### **E. DIVISIONS/GROUPS**

- Divisions are assigned by their geographic location (North Division).
- Groups are assigned by their function (Ventilation Group).
- Divisions / Groups should be utilized to assign an area of responsibility to a supervisor in order to maintain span of control.
- Division or Group supervisors should communicate with their assigned units via face-to-face communications as much as possible to reduce radio traffic on the fireground but should keep Command informed of progress via radio on any problems encountered and significant progress.
- Once a Division/Group is established, the supervisor of that Division/Group shall request resources via the IC who will only assign units but not tactics. Specific tactics will be assigned by the Division/Group.

#### **F. RADIO BEST PRACTICES**

- **Short-specific-** Before transmitting know what you are going to say. Choose precise terms to communicate the desired message as clearly and briefly as possible without wasting airtime.
- **Task Oriented/Company Oriented-** Command's orders to operating companies should indicate a specific task assigned to the company. They should be of a magnitude reasonably performed by a single company alone or in concert with other companies.
- **Indicate Objective-** In addition to being task and company oriented, assignments should indicate an objective to the action. The company should know exactly where to go, to whom to report, what is the task and what is the objective of the task. Orders should tell what to do - not how to do it (unless Command wants something specific).
- **Clear Tone/Self Control Effective Rate-** Speak clearly at a practiced rate. Not too fast and not too slow. Control your emotions and excitement deliberately. If you do not consciously control your voice, it will become garbled under stress.
- **Well Timed/Spaced-** Prioritize your messages. Do not use valuable airtime with unimportant messages and insignificant details. Maintain an awareness of the overall situation and your role in it. Do not interrupt conversations unless you have Emergency Traffic. Listen before transmitting and wait until a message transaction has been completed. Pause between consecutive

messages. This will make it clear when one message has been completed and another started. It also allows other units to break in with urgent/emergent traffic if applicable.

**XII. RECISION**

This Standard Operating Procedure rescinds all directives regarding Fire Ground Communicatins or similar content previously issued for personnel of the Carroll County Department of Fire & EMS.