



Carroll County Department of Fire & EMS

Standard Operating Procedure

Standard Operating Procedure: 4.1.5	Effective Date: 9/22/2025
Subject: MAYDAY Procedures	Section: Fire/Rescue Operations
Authorized: Deputy Chief Paul Supko	Revision Date: N/A

Applicability: ☒ Volunteer ☒ Career

I. PURPOSE

To establish a procedure for personnel to utilize to alert Command that an imminent life-threatening situation exists.

II. DEFINITIONS

Command Restricted Talk Group: A mechanism for incident commanders to quickly and efficiently limit and control radio transmissions.

Emergency Activation Button (EB): Orange button located on the portable radio and remote speaker mic that activates the emergency alert mode which transmits an emergency signal and identify the radio designation.

MAYDAY: term used to alert the Incident Commander or other persons that personnel are in an imminent life-threatening situation.

Personnel Accountability Report (PAR): Radio reports provided to command to ensure each crew is intact and all crewmembers are accounted for.

Personal Alert Safety System (PASS): Devices worn by emergency responders to signal distress or need of assistance in extreme environments.

Rapid Intervention Crew (RIC): A crew (unit) specifically designated by the Incident Commander whose sole responsibility is the rescue of members in distress.

Ruthless Preemption: A feature that is activated when the emergency button is depressed, that provides the user activating the EB priority radio usage over all other portable and mobile radios, with the exception of a ECC console.

III. PROCEDURES

A. Declaring a MAYDAY

1. When personnel operating on the scene of an emergency incident find themselves or others in a life-threatening situation and require immediate assistance, they shall instantly declare a MAYDAY.
2. Declaration of a MAYDAY shall be limited to only those situations which demand immediate action by on scene resources to come to the aid of a distressed member. Examples would include:
 - a. Personnel trapped or entangled
 - b. Personnel lost
 - c. Personnel out of air
 - d. Serious medical emergency
3. Members will depress their emergency button (EB) then declare a MAYDAY by transmitting a verbal message over the operational incident talk group. The message shall begin with:

“MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY” and immediately followed by:

 - a. WHO - is calling the MAYDAY
 - b. WHAT - is the problem
 - c. WHERE - is the location Personnel calling a MAYDAY must make certain that the MAYDAY is acknowledged. If no acknowledgement is received, personnel should utilize the EB function of the portable radio.
4. Depressing the EB on the top of the portable radio will transmit an emergency alert over all radio consoles to alert ECC an emergency exists. Personnel must give a verbal message as listed above and receive an acknowledgement.
5. Depressing the EB will give the member Ruthless Preemption. This feature gives the member priority when they key up the portable radio. When doing so you will bump off anyone speaking and “own” the channel for transmitting. The IC may choose to depress their EB to also gain the ability to have ruthless preemption.
6. All members entering an IDLH will have a portable radio and will activate the emergency button when in distress. The Personal Alert Safety System (PASS) is to be activated to alert members that an emergency exists.

B. Emergency Communications Center

1. The monitoring of operational incident talk groups by the ECC dispatcher is an essential component of firefighter safety. Any time that an ECC dispatcher recognizes that an emergency exists they are to immediately notify the IC. If a MAYDAY is transmitted by a unit and not acknowledge by the IC, the ECC dispatcher shall attempt to alert the IC that an emergency exists.
2. If an EB has been activated from a fireground unit, ECC shall immediately notify the IC and take action to identify the unit involved.
3. As soon as a MAYDAY has been declared, ECC shall dispatch the next Alarm.
4. The ECC shall designate a dispatcher to the sole responsibility of monitoring the designated MAYDAY talk group. The dispatcher shall assist the IC and ensure pertinent information is acknowledged.
5. At the conclusion of the MAYDAY event, ECC will make an announcement on all radio channels and return to normal operational mode.

C. Incident Command

1. Upon receipt of a MAYDAY, the IC shall immediately acknowledge the unit/person calling and confirm the following information:
 - a. WHO - is calling the MAYDAY
 - b. WHAT - is the problem
 - c. WHERE - is the location
2. The IC shall repeat the information back to ensure confirmation and accuracy. After acknowledging the MAYDAY, IC will request that an alert tone be transmitted by ECC. ECC shall transmit the alert tone over the operational incident talk group(s) and Main-1.
3. At the conclusion of the alert tone, the IC will announce that a MAYDAY has been declared for:
 - a. WHO - is calling the MAYDAY
 - b. WHAT - is the problem
 - c. WHERE - is the location
4. The IC will make the following transmission on the Tac Channel:

"Command to all units; a MAYDAY has been declared on the fireground, all units must maintain radio silence unless you have a life saving message."

5. IC will utilize the RIT based upon an established action plan (WHO; WHAT; WHERE). Appropriate deployment is generally considered to be:
 - a. Reported location
 - b. Last known location
 - c. Most hazardous area first
6. IC is to request additional resources as appropriate.
 - a. The next alarm is to be automatically dispatched by the ECC.
 - b. Ensure appropriate level of EMS resources is available for potential number of victims.
 - c. Ensure sufficient resources to maintain suppression efforts.
7. IC must control the fireground communications.
 - a. Non-essential radio traffic is to cease.
 - b. Members in distress will not be expected to switch radio channels.
 - c. Assign officer to monitor the talk group the MAYDAY was called on.
 - d. The IC has the option of using alternate talk groups or ordering radio silence until the MAYDAY is cleared.
 - e. Face-to-face communications should be utilized within groups and divisions.
8. Expand the Incident Management System (IMS)
 - a. As a minimum, the functional areas of suppression and RIT (rescue) must be separated.
 - b. Additional Branches, Divisions and Groups shall be established based upon the needs and the anticipated needs of the incident. Consideration should be given to EMS, Staging, PIO, CISM, Family/Survivors Support.
 - c. MAYDAY Tactical Worksheet shall be used to coordinate Operations
9. The IC shall complete a personnel accountability report (PAR) as soon as possible. The PAR should not be done over the talk group at a time that would be a detriment to the MAYDAY event. PAR's at the division/group level should be conducted immediately and through face-to-face communication.
10. Upon confirmation that the MAYDAY issue has been resolved, and after a complete PAR has been conducted, the IC will clear the MAYDAY and return units to a normal operating mode.
11. After the MAYDAY event has been cleared, the IC will reassess the Incident's priorities and make any needed adjustments to the incident action plan. The adjustments to the incident action plan and the current operational mode shall be communicated to all branches, divisions, and groups.

D. Division/Group/Unit Supervisor

1. Officers operating on the scene of any emergency must ensure close accountability of personnel and/or units (resources) under their command. Officers must be prepared to give an accurate accountability report at any time.
2. When a MAYDAY has been declared, all officers must adhere to operational discipline and keep assigned personnel and/or units under control. Personnel and/or units must not self-deploy into the rescue effort.
3. Officers must be aware and listen for a change in talk group assignments and switch to the correct talk group.
4. Division/Group/Unit supervisors shall ensure that any rescue or search for distressed member(s) is a coordinated effort at the authorization of the IC.
5. Only crews in direct physical contact with distressed member(s) may engage in any rescue effort.
6. Division/Group/Unit supervisors shall immediately account for all assigned members. This should be accomplished by face-to-face contact, leaving the radio frequency clear for emergency traffic.
7. If personnel and/or units are unaccounted for, the IC must be notified immediately.
8. If personnel and/or units have been accounted for, the officer will give the report when called for.
9. Division/Group/Unit supervisors shall ensure that operational assignments are carried out and suppression efforts are maintained.

E. All Operating Personnel actions/responsibilities

1. Every member working on the scene of an emergency incident must ensure that accountability is maintained at the unit level. Personnel must keep their direct supervisor apprised of their current location and progress.
2. Each member is responsible to work in groups. Every group must be radio equipped, and every effort must be made to not become separated.
3. When a MAYDAY has been declared, every member must adhere to operational discipline, not freelance into the rescue effort.

4. Members must be aware and listen for a change in the talk group assignment and switch to the correct talk group.
5. When a MAYDAY has been declared, each member shall immediately report to their assigned officer for accountability. This should be accomplished by face-to-face contact whenever possible, leaving the radio frequency clear for emergency traffic.
6. If the member's officer is unaccounted for, the IC must be notified immediately.

IV. RECISION

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

V. RELATED STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES / DOCUMENTS

- A. Policy 4.1.1 Incident Management System
- B. Policy 4.1.2 Communications
- C. Policy 4.1.6 4.1.6 RIT & 2 In/ 2 Out Functions

VI. ATTACHMENTS

- A. I/C MayDay Work Sheet