



General Operating Guideline # 801
Subject: Communications with Dispatch Agency
Approval: February 16, 2023

Section 1: Purpose

The purpose of this guideline is to establish basic communication guidelines to be used by emergency services agencies and their dispatch centers to communicate and receive clear and concise information and reduce any confusion between the dispatch center and the responding departments.

Section 2: Scope

The guideline is applicable to all Fire Departments within Lunenburg Regional Fire and Emergency Services and to the emergency dispatch agencies providing services to these Departments.

Section 3: Department Dispatch Channel

South Dispatch A is the designated TMR dispatch channel. It is not to be used as an operational channel for department or for inter-department communications on the incident scene. A TMR operational channel shall be assigned for scene operations where required. The TMR Dispatch channel is voice recorded.

Dispatch agencies will not routinely monitor VHF channels unless specifically requested to by the Department. VHF channels are not voice recorded by the dispatch agency.

Section 4: Communications with Dispatch Agency

Both emergency and non-emergency situations may be involved as follows;

4.1 Call Dispatch Paging and Response

Many Departments have detailed paging protocols for specific types of incidents. The dispatch agency shall establish communication initially with the fire department having jurisdictional authority for the emergency reported and execute these paging protocols correctly. It is the responsibility of the Fire Department to regularly review their dispatch protocols.

The elapsed time between the receipt of the 911 call and Fire Department dispatch page shall be no longer than 2 minutes.

Unless otherwise indicated in specific Department protocols, dispatches will generally consist of the following;

1. a **1st dispatch page followed by a repeat 2nd dispatch page** consisting of a set of department specific alert tones, followed by a standard verbal message containing only pertinent information required for emergency response. The dispatch message should be as short as possible indicating the type of emergency or reason for the page. The civic number of the



incident and all pertinent information provided by the caller to locate the incident must be included.

2. a **3rd dispatch page** if the 2nd page is not acknowledged by the Fire Department. The dispatch agency shall attempt to contact the department using cell phone or other means if there has been no acknowledgement of the paging attempts or confirmation of Department apparatus responding to the incident scene **within 5 minutes** of the 3rd page.
3. If there is no response to the dispatches, to ensure a proper emergency response the dispatch agency shall refer to existing protocols and commence paging of the next closest and available Fire Department. A standard paging cycle shall be repeated for the alternate Fire Department. Once acknowledged, the alternate Fire Department takes IC responsibilities until IC is formally transferred.
4. **Note:** Many departments use the I am Responding (IAR) system for supplemental text paging. For those departments the dispatch agency will send additional IAR text pages with all pertinent information. The Fire Department is responsible to set up and maintain the appropriate IAR subscriptions for its membership. For mutual aid calls involving multiple departments the IAR text system can be used to quickly notify mutual aid departments following the initial page to the primary response Department. The IAR system is intended as a supplemental system (not a substitute) to the regular paging system and all paging of the mutual aid partners must be completed.

The senior officer in charge from the responding department shall:

- a) acknowledge the dispatch page once enroute to the fire station or incident scene as soon as possible following the 1st or 2nd pages. Any specific instructions for further paging or other instructions should be provided to the dispatch center at this time.
- b) notify the dispatch center of the response **when apparatus and personnel are enroute to the incident scene**. This notification should cover all apparatus and personnel responding.
- c) acknowledge the receipt of any special instructions from the dispatch agency to e.g. stage at a certain location until the scene is cleared by police, reported hazards etc.
- d) notify the dispatch agency of the **arrival of the apparatus and personnel on scene** and that they are assuming command and communications.
- e) advise the dispatch agency to page **“Stand Down”** of specific resources if the IC at scene determines fire department resources dispatched are not required. **All stand down orders and pages shall be acknowledged by a senior officer of the specific responding department.**



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- f) notify the dispatch agency when **apparatus and personnel are clearing the incident scene and returning to station.**
- g) notify the dispatch agency **when apparatus and personnel are back to station and advise of the Department's readiness for emergency response.**
- h) Once the scene is cleared by the primary responding Department, an Officer of that Department will advise the dispatch agency to release any TMR operational channels assigned to the incident.

4.2 Emergency Communications with Dispatch

Other typical communications with the dispatch agency may include:

1. **If there is an accident or other emergency enroute to scene** the responding unit will immediately advise the dispatch agency of their situation. The dispatch agency will dispatch appropriate emergency services to assist the original responding department and provide coverage from alternate Departments for the initial dispatch based on instructions from the primary responding department.
2. **Urgent messages** are restricted to emergencies where life or personal injury is at stake, or critical situations that require immediate assistance. Urgent messages will be given priority over all other phone or radio traffic and will be immediately acknowledged. The dispatch agency will announce to all units that communications is for emergency traffic only at this time.

4.3 Non-emergency Communications with Dispatch

Although the priority of the dispatch agency is managing the emergency communications, there are some situations that may require additional non-emergency communications;

1. When radio/telephone traffic becomes unduly heavy, the dispatch agency may announce that **"All units standby"** and may be temporarily unable to answer. Under these circumstances Departments should not direct requests to the dispatch agency unless it is an emergency and the request is urgent.
2. Special non-emergency announcements made by dispatch for a fire department are to be minimal and requested only by a senior officer. These announcements should be limited to matters of importance to the department or its mutual aid partners e.g. response services and availability, meeting and training announcements, etc. **Approved special announcements will be handled during the daily pager test cycles.**
3. The dispatch agency shall conduct the pager tests with each fire department daily at specified times.
4. When requested to call the Fire Marshall's Office, the dispatch agency will identify the department making the request, the IC's name, call back number, and the reason for the request.

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Section 5: Mutual Aid

Mutual Aid responses carry the same general responsibilities as primary single alarm response procedures. Fire departments responding to a mutual aid page shall notify the dispatch agency according to the same procedures as a primary call.

1. The need for mutual aid assistance will be predetermined by response protocols or by the IC in charge of the incident.
2. The dispatch agency will page out specific resources from mutual aid partners as requested by the IC or through predetermined dispatch protocols outlining the automatic or mutual aid assistance to be dispatched.
3. In the case of Hazmat incidents or in situations involving a criminal element, the dispatch agency shall contact the appropriate agency and confirm when resources are on scene.
4. Incoming mutual aid departments shall contact the IC on the on the assigned TMR Operational Channel or talk group. Typically (VHF) channels are used for specific incident scene communications.
5. Responding units will remain available on scene or in staging as required. Under no circumstances will a responding unit leave the staging area or scene without approval from the IC. If a responding unit is no longer required, the IC will advise them of their "**Release from Scene**". The officer in charge of the responding unit will advise his crews accordingly and the dispatch agency accordingly.

Section 6: Interagency Communications

Emergencies often involve the response of many public safety agencies, most commonly DNR, DPW, EHS, RCMP, Life Flight, etc. Direct communications with these agencies in most cases is possible through use of specific TMR radio frequencies assigned to these agencies or as may be set up on assigned mutual aid channels. Alternatively, the dispatch agency will contact the specific agency on behalf of fire department.

Section 7: Use of Available TMR and VHF Channels

7.1 Single alarms and low complexity incidents

Again, all communications with the dispatch agency shall be by TMR on South Dispatch A. In addition to any TMR operational channels assigned, on single alarms and low complexity incidents the Department's specific VHF operating channels may be used for on scene communications or for special needs, e.g. SCBA, pump operations, water supply etc.



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7.2 Multiple Alarms and Mutual Aid

On large and complex incidents where there are multiple fire departments and other agencies involved, not all agencies will have the required VHF channels programmed and will be unable to communicate easily with IC. In these cases, to facilitate proper unit to unit communications, TMR Operational Channels or Mutual Aid groups will be utilized. The dispatch agency will monitor the dispatch channel on the TMR system.

The dispatch agency will assign TMR Operational Channels or Mutual Aid channels as required and operational communication will move to an assigned channel. The dispatch agency does not monitor these operational channels. Always use the dispatch channel to communicate with the dispatch agency.

The dispatch agency will work with Shubie to obtain additional talk groups for multi-agency incidents as may be required.

Section 8: Failure of Communications

If contact between the dispatch agency and the fire department fails on a selected frequency, communications will transfer to a backup system appropriate to the areas they are working i.e. back up paging units, cell phone, etc.

If there are continuing problems the fire department shall contact the Department of Public Safety and request that they assist in setting up required communication links through their mobile communications resources.