



**City of Winchester
Fire and Rescue Department
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE**



Section: Communications	SOP: 6.4
Subject: Emergency Activation and Responder Safety	Effective: September 7, 2016 Revised: September 10, 2016
Revised:	
 Allen W. Baldwin, Fire Chief	

SCOPE

To establish procedures for the effective dispatching and use of radio communications during responder emergency and non-emergency incidents.

PURPOSE

To ensure that all personnel utilizing the City radio communications system understands fire department dispatching procedures for the activation of an emergency event that involves first responders.

RESPONSIBILITY

It shall be the responsibility of all personnel that operate on the Winchester Fire and Rescue Department (WFRD) and Winchester Emergency Communications Center (ECC) radio communication system to understand and use this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for all emergency radio communications.

EMERGENCY ACTIVATION

All WFRD portable and mobile units in the radio communications system are equipped with an “Orange” Emergency Activation (EA) button. When depressed, the EA button will broadcast an emergency signal to all dispatch consoles in the ECC and radio equipment in the field that are tuned to the same talkgroup as the EA activation.

Radio Alias and Identification

1. Any time a radio with a (RPAC I) programmed unit identifier is keyed up, the assigned radio “alias” (e.g., the unit name) will display on all dispatcher’s consoles.

Activating the EA Button

1. Initiating an EA signifies a critical or hostile situation in which the first responder's imminent safety is threatened and immediate assistance is needed. Therefore, all EAs will be treated seriously and should not be used unless personnel are in immediate danger or during designated training/testing.
2. The user must understand the EA will transmit the emergency signal to the talkgroup currently selected to that radio.

For example: Engine 4 is on the scene of a working structure fire and their radio assignment is FIRE-2. When Engine 4's EA is activated the emergency signal will transmit to the ECC and any other radio selected for FIRE-2. The EA will be displayed on that talkgroup on the dispatcher console.

3. An exception to the above occurs when the user changes radio channels during an EA. The emergency signal will move to, and continue on, the newly selected talkgroup without having to depress the EA button again. It is essential that every user maintain familiarity with the location and operation of the EA button on every radio they use.
4. All radios that have the EA button enabled are equipped with a "HOT" microphone feature, which will keep the radio in transmit mode for approximately 10 seconds after the EA has been initiated. This will allow the controlling dispatcher or other listeners to obtain a better understanding of the hostile situation.

When an EA is Received

Once an EA is received by the ECC, the transmission will fall into four categories:

1. Incidents without command established
 2. Incidents with command established
 3. Non-incident related
 4. Accidental
1. Incidents without command established
 - a. When a unit is on an incident without command established, (e.g., a medical call), and an EA is activated, the ECC shall make **three** attempts to contact the unit in 15 second intervals. The following radio traffic shall take place by the ECC: **"Engine 4 from Headquarters, confirm or deny."**
 - b. If the unit fails to respond and is on a single resource call, the ECC will immediately dispatch law enforcement and the Battalion Officer as an emergency incident to locate and determine the condition of Fire and Rescue Personnel.

- c. If the EA is accidental, the unit will respond with the following: ***“Headquarters from Engine 4, DENY”***. “Deny” is the ONLY keyword that will cancel an EA activation.
- d. If the unit fails to respond and there are additional fire/EMS units on scene, the ECC will attempt to contact those units to identify a reason for the EA. If there is no response from any of the on scene units, or a reason for the EA cannot be determined, additional resources shall be dispatched per item “B” above.

2. Incidents with Command Established

- a. If any unit activates an EA and is involved in an incident with command established, the ECC will notify the Incident Commander (IC) with the alias name or unit identifier of the radio broadcasting the EA. The ECC shall provide the following information to the IC over the established Command Channel: ***“Command from Headquarters, we are receiving an EA signal from Engine 4 on FIRE-4.”***
- b. When making an EA notification to Command, the dispatcher should remain alert for any unit attempting to make a “MAYDAY” announcement. If heard, the dispatcher shall immediately end their transmission so the “MAYDAY” can be heard. After the “MAYDAY” transmission has ended; the dispatcher shall then listen for confirmation of the “MAYDAY” by the IC. If the IC does not confirm receipt of the “MAYDAY”, the dispatcher shall relay the EA information and any “MAYDAY” information received.
- c. **Talkgroup assignments beyond what is monitored by the ECC (FIRE-1, FIRE-2, FIRE-3) should only be assigned by the IC when monitoring of those talkgroups can be managed on the incident scene.**

3. Non-Incident Related

- a. **When a unit is not on an incident, (e.g., inspection, grocery store),** and an EA is activated, the ECC shall make **three** attempts to contact the unit in 15 second intervals. The following radio traffic shall take place by the ECC: ***“Engine 4 from Headquarters, confirm or deny.”***
- b. If the unit fails to respond and is on a single resource call, the ECC will immediately dispatch law enforcement and the Battalion Officer as an emergency incident to locate and determine the condition of Fire and Rescue Personnel.
- c. If the EA is accidental, the unit will respond with the following: ***“Headquarters from Engine 4, DENY”***. “Deny” is the ONLY keyword that will cancel a EA activation.

4. Accidental

- a. If a unit accidentally activates the EA button, the unit shall “**DENY**” the acknowledgement from the ECC.
- b. The only word that will cancel the EA activation is “**DENY**”. If deny is not received the EA shall be treated as one of the above types.

Clearing an EA Activation

1. To clear an EA activation, the ECC must first clear it on their console only after receipt of a “DENY” from the radio user.
2. The radio user should then push and hold the EA button until hearing a signal from the radio. This usually requires one to three seconds of depressing the EA button.

Testing the Emergency Activation System

1. During the Monday morning radio checks, the ECC shall test the EA activation system with department personnel.
2. Station personnel shall be contacted to activate their EA when instructed to do so by ECC and follow the outline procedure for canceling. ECC shall rotate this test between stations for verification of use.
3. At times, the WFRD may utilize the EA procedure during training exercises and will arrange this through the ECC.

OTHER RESPONDER SAFETY PROCEDURES

Verbal communications over the radio communication system is another method of providing personnel safety to first responders. A series of signal codes used by personnel shall be used to notify the ECC of responder safety. In addition, the ECC will provide welfare checks at set time intervals to ensure responders safety.

Signal Codes

- **Signal 1** – Responder in immediate danger
 - **Signal 2** – Responder needs backup/assistance
 - **Signal 4** – Holding transmission of sensitive information
1. **Signal 1 (Urgent)** will have law enforcement respond emergent. A verbal transmission of “**Signal 1**” by on scene responders will warrant no further radio traffic from the ECC. ECC shall immediately dispatch law enforcement and a command officer to the incident location. Responding WFRD units shall stage until given the all-clear by law enforcement. Sample radio traffic:
 - a. *Responder “Headquarters from Medic 5, Signal 1”*
 - b. *ECC “Medic 5 confirm Signal 1”*

2. **Signal 2 (Non Urgent)** will have law enforcement respond in a non-emergency mode to assist during a non-threatening situation. Responders shall advise the ECC of the situation they are encountering.
3. **Signal 4** alerts responders that ECC is holding transmission of sensitive information until the responder goes to a secure location (non-emergency) to transmit private/confidential information.

Welfare Checks

1. ECC personnel shall contact on-scene personnel on **every incident** at 10 minute intervals to check on the welfare of the responders.
2. If the unit fails to respond, the ECC will immediately dispatch law enforcement and the Battalion Officer as an emergency incident to locate and determine the condition of Fire and Rescue Personnel.
3. After law enforcement and the Battalion Officer are dispatched, ECC shall make an attempt to contact the responders via all available radio channels, call the phone number of incident location, and/or responder personal cellphone if known.

PRIORITY/EMERGENCY RADIO TRAFFIC PROCEDURES

At any time deemed necessary, responders may announce that they have priority or emergency traffic to transmit. Some examples could include a unit on scene trying to give pertinent size-up information while others are marking up and still en-route, a Mayday situation, a building collapse or any time responders need to interrupt radio communications to announce emergency/priority information.

Priority Traffic – communication is urgent in nature but can wait for ECC to acknowledge and answer.

Emergency Traffic – communication to ECC is of utmost priority. It may involve requesting additional resources, witnessing a serious event or firefighter safety may be in jeopardy. ECC will announce for *“All units to hold their traffic”* and then communicate with the unit declaring the emergency traffic. The following procedure shall be used:

1. Units with priority/emergency traffic should announce their unit designator and then transmit their message using the 4C model. This information should be repeated a second time. During this time all other radio communication shall cease and only the unit transmitting, officer in charge, ECC or others pertinent to the priority/emergency traffic should use the radio communication system.
2. A decision will be made by the officer in charge or ECC to move this traffic to an alternate talkgroup.
3. At the conclusion of the radio traffic event, the incident commander or ECC shall announce to all ***“radio communications can resume to normal operations”***.

OPEN MICROPHONE PROCEDURES

In the event that a radio microphone is inadvertently open to radio traffic, ECC shall identify the radio with the open mic by their unit alias. ECC shall make an announcement ***“All units check for an open mic”*** and give the unit name that is associated. If the situation does not clear in a timely fashion, ECC shall set off the city page and transmit a long tone and announce the message again until the open mic is cleared.

If an open mic situation occurs after 2100 hours, all stations are to be toned through the station alerting system and then the above message sent. If at 90 seconds the situation is not cleared, then ECC shall consider demobilizing the open mic unit until the situation is rectified.