Issued by: Fire Chief Scott E. Goldstein

Policy Number: 24-01

Authority: Montgomery County Code Section 21-3 (b)

Supersedes: This is a new policy.

Effective Date: July 1, 2017

SECTION 1. Purpose:

To standardize incident communications.

SECTION 2. Applicability:

All MCFRS personnel while participating in MCFRS activities and personnel from other organizations while operating in Montgomery County.

SECTION 3. Background:

This appendix brings the history of incident communications in MCFRS along with best practices drawn from other agencies into a single concept for managing incident communications and it represents the beginning of an ongoing process to standardize incident communications.

There are some provisions of this appendix that apply to dispatch communications, however, the focus of this appendix is on incident communications. This focus includes an explanation for critical terms and the actions that those terms should provoke.

SECTION 4. Definitions

See Appendix Q.

SECTION 5. Policy:

a. The MCFRS radio system is the primary tool for incident communications.

b. Efficient communications make use of all available incident communications pathways.

1. While the use of countywide talkgroups for incident operations allows for global situational awareness about ongoing incidents, radio traffic is only one piece of the communications framework.

2. It is still possible and sometimes necessary to communicate using body language, face-to-face communications, and other signals.

3. The Incident Commander must remain mindful of the available talk time and take measures as necessary to ensure that there is room for critical communications.

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c. Radio Returns

1. A radio return is a short radio transmission that provides an update on the status of the incident. Radio returns are one method for providing system level situational awareness.

2. For any incident dispatched as or meeting the definition of a complex incident the Incident Commander must provide a radio return when placing units in service.

d. Location, Conditions, Actions, Needs (LCAN) Reports

1. By adding "Location" to the "C-A-N" report framework the Incident Commander is afforded multiple opportunities to discover and rectify discrepancies between where they thought units were operating and where those units were actually operating.

2. Whenever a unit provides an update to an Incident Commander they must use the LCAN format.

3. The exception is for structure fires where the LCAN report does not replace the Initial On Scene Report or the Situation Update Report.

e. Evacuations

1. MCFRS uses the term "evacuate" to identify situations where an imminent danger to life or health exists and the Incident Commander wants all personnel to immediately leave the hazard area or structure.

2. When this situation occurs it is important to have a single, non-negotiable term to identify the situation and initiate action. [VA1]

3. When the Incident Commander orders an evacuation, all personnel must immediately leave the hazard area or structure.

4. Attempts to negotiate with the Incident Commander about an evacuation order may lead to confusion and delay and must not occur.

5. An evacuation order is also an order for radio silence. Units must remain silent on the radio unless they have an emergency, priority message or are called for.

f. Personnel Accountability Report (PAR)

1. A PAR does not remove or diminish the duty of unit officers and supervisors to remain constantly aware of where their personnel are operating, nor does it remove or diminish the responsibility of personnel to ensure that their supervisor is aware of their location.

2. PARs should be conducted for units operating in IDLH environments generally at 20 minute intervals and generally around the same time as the Incident Duration Reminder (IDR).

3. The IDR is a warning for supervisors to prepare for a PAR.

4. Personnel not assigned to the IDLH are not typically included in PARs.

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5. Nothing precludes the Incident Commander from expanding a PAR when they have reason to believe personnel may be missing or when the incident expands rapidly.

g. SIGNAL3

1. SIGNAL3 is a term that indicates that personnel are in immediate danger of bodily harm. It may only be used when personnel feel that they or other fire/rescue personnel are in immediate danger of bodily harm or death and there is no immediate way to escape from that harm.

2. The use of this term is a serious matter. It generates an emergency response from command officers and the police treat a SIGNAL3 in the same manner as they would for an officer in distress.

3. Police officers may even leave other calls for service to respond to the SIGNAL3.

4. Nothing in this document precludes ECC from initiating a SIGNAL3 on behalf of personnel based on the nature of their radio transmissions, e.g., the sounds of fighting in the background, even if those personnel do not use the emergency communication.

h. Mayday

1. Mayday is typically only used during structural firefighting operations. Mayday is a distress signal used to announce that a responder is in need of assistance from a hazard that poses an immediate threat to their health or safety from which no immediate escape is possible.

2. When the term "Mayday" is used by a unit or person not engaged in firefighting activity the ECC will exercise judgement and may initiate a SIGNAL3 if that is the more appropriate response.

i. Priority

1. The use of this term must be limited to situations where, should the transmission go unacknowledged it is reasonable to assume that severe harm to personnel or adverse incident outcomes might follow.

2. When a priority message is transmitted radio silence is in effect until the Incident Commander acknowledges the message.

j. Radio Silence

1. There are times when the Incident Commander must limit radio communications so that he/she can transmit important incident information or provide orders.

2. When this term is used, personnel must not talk on the tactical talkgroup with the exception of situations meeting the SIGNAL3, Mayday, or priority classifications, until the Incident Commander lifts radio silence.

k. Unacknowledged Transmissions

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1. Whenever a Priority, SIGNAL3 or Mayday message is unacknowledged, all personnel are empowered and responsible to make Command or ECC aware of the message.

SECTION 6. Responsibility:

All personnel.

SECTION 7. Procedure:

a. LCAN Reports: LCAN reports must follow the format below:

1. Location: Where are you operating?

2. Conditions: What the current conditions in your area?

3. Actions: What actions are you taking? What actions are you planning to take?

4. Needs: What resource needs do you have?

b. Radio Returns. The radio return must include the final nature of the incident, occupant status, fire extension, smoke conditions, number and severity of patients, the status of other hazards and the units to be held, as applicable to the incident.

c. Incident Duration Reminders (IDRs)

1. When providing an IDR, the ECC will vocalize on the tactical talkgroup, "Command, you are XX minutes since dispatch."

2. An Incident Commander wishing to stop IDRs must verbalize this via radio.

d. Evacuations

1. The evacuation order must be given on ALL talkgroups associated with the incident.

2. All personnel must immediately leave the hazard area without confusion or delay and without regard for equipment.

3. In the case of structure fires, especially those with multiple separate areas or levels the Incident Commander must be specific about which areas or levels the evacuation order applies to.

4. An evacuation order is also an order for radio silence. Units should remain silent unless they have an emergency, priority message or are called for.

5. Personnel must leave in an orderly fashion and minimize placing other units in danger by leaving, e.g., those tending taglines should not leave before they retrieve those on the other end of the tag line.

6. The Incident Commander should give consideration to ordering apparatus drivers to sound their air horns in three long blasts.

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7. The Incident Commander should give consideration to ordering ECC to sound the evacuation tone on ALL talkgroups associated with the incident.

8. The Incident Commander must conduct a PAR as soon as possible after the order is given.

e. PAR

1. The PAR usually begins with the units in the most hazardous positions, working outward from there.

2. The Incident Commander should provide a verbal warning of an impending PAR by radio before the PAR is conducted and allow a reasonable time for supervisors to confirm their accountability before beginning the PAR.

3. The Incident Commander may poll during the PAR as he/she deems appropriate for the circumstances but generally when groups/divisions are established polling should occur by groups/divisions.

4. When the Incident Commander polls unit during a PAR, he/she will ask the entity they are polling; "your accountability" Example: "Command to Vent Group, your accountability?"

5. Supervisors responding to a PAR poll must respond with the word "even" if all members assigned to the IDLH are accounted for.

   A. Example: "Command to Vent Group, your accountability?", "Vent Group is 'even'. "

6. If all members are not accounted for the supervisor must immediately provide as much information as possible to the Incident Commander about the identity and last known location of the missing person.

   A. Example: "Command to Vent Group, your accountability?", "Vent Group to Command, we have three personnel, T799 Right missing, last seen on second floor."

f. SIGNAL3

1. When faced with a situation meeting the "SIGNAL3" criteria personnel must first state their exact location, including apartment number, floor, or other pertinent geographic information and whenever possible the nature of the threat.

2. It is possible to activate a "SIGNAL3" without verbalizing it by depressing the EB on the radio. The ECC will "challenge" a non-verbal EB activation in accordance with other policy and in the event of no response or an "inadequate" response they will initiate SIGNAL3.

g. Mayday

1. Mayday procedures are outlined in the Rapid Intervention and Mayday Appendix.

h. Priority Radio Transmission

1. When personnel have a situation meeting the criteria for a priority transmission they must announce their unit identifier, and say "priority" then wait to be acknowledged by Command or ECC.

SECTION 8. Cancellation:

This is a new policy.

SECTION 9. Attachments:

None.

Approved:

Scott E. Goldstein   April 14, 2017
     Fire Chief