

SECTION:	402
TITLE:	RADIO USE for Fire/Rescue/EMS
SUPERCEDES/RESCINDS:	11-01-2007
EFFECTIVE DATE:	04-13-2011

The purpose of this policy is to establish a standard in the use of radio communications for Fire, EMS and Rescue agencies in Northampton County. All authorized users of frequencies licensed to and managed by the Northampton County Division of Emergency Management Services shall operate on said frequencies with the goal of efficient, effective and safe operations of the public safety agencies. Radio communications shall be conducted in such a manner that provides for brevity with well-formatted information.

References to “Incident Command” throughout this policy are inclusive of the concepts for both an individual “Incident Commander” and “Unified Command,” in accordance with FEMA’s National Response Framework (NRF), Incident Command System (ICS), and National Incident Management System (NIMS).

- A. Radio Authorization
 - a. All Users of the Northampton County Radio Infrastructure shall obtain permission for transmitting on frequencies licensed and managed by Northampton County.
 - i. All users and agencies are required to comply with Northampton County Emergency Management Services’ Radio Authorization & Programming policy. And applicable FCC Regulations.
- B. Radio Transmitting
 - a. Prior to transmitting, users shall monitor the channel to ensure that other transmissions will not be interrupted.
 - i. Units shall not cause interference with any radio communications, verbally or electronically.
 - b. Units shall pause for a minimum of one second after depressing the Push-to-Talk (PTT) button prior to speaking to allow for repeater key-up time and identifier to transmit.
- C. Prohibited Language
 - a. The use of profane, indecent or obscene language is prohibited.
 - b. Uncivil, derogatory, sarcastic and argumentative remarks are prohibited.
- D. Messages Transmitted via Radio
 - a. All users shall be identified by their complete radio designation.
 - i. The use of names, titles, nicknames and abbreviated unit numbers are prohibited. *Example: Unit 5251 shall be transmitted as “Fifty-two Fifty-one.”*
 - b. Messages shall be transmitted in a “Sender to Receiver” format.
 - i. Transmissions initiated by Northampton County; “(Northampton) County to [Unit]”
 - ii. Transmissions initiated by User: “[Unit] to (Northampton) County.”
 - c. Acknowledging Transmissions & Echoing

- i. In order to ensure the intended recipient has received the message, recipients shall acknowledge the message received by the use of their unit designation in the acknowledgement. Example: "Fifty-two fifty-one, received."
- ii. Any messages received by Northampton County shall be acknowledged by stating the Sender's complete unit number, and echoing the Sender's message (paraphrasing is acceptable), followed by the time. Example: "County to Fifty-two fifty-one. Assuming Command. Twelve-zero-six hours."
- iii. If at any time a message is unclear, either party must clarify or request clarification.

d. Message Content

- i. All radio communications shall be done in plain English.
- ii. Terminology for Status Changes
 1. Northampton County shall be informed of unit status changes in order to manage resources appropriately. Any status change that shall affect the agency's availability for response shall be reported.
 - a. "Responding" – Unit going to an incident.
 - b. "On-Scene" – Unit arriving at an incident.
 - c. "En-Route to" – Unit going from the incident to another location; i.e. hospital, etc.
 - d. "At" – Unit arriving at the other location; i.e. hospital.
 - e. "Available" – Unit is ready for service.
 - f. "Out of Service" – Specifically reported as a unit or station, is unavailable for dispatch.

e. Response Communications

- i. Messages Transmitted from Personnel (Assigned Portables and Mobiles to an Individual Person)
 1. For any one incident, a maximum of three (3) portables for any primary response agency on initial dispatch shall be permitted on radio. One (1) portable from any mutually-dispatched agency on an Initial Dispatch is permitted.
 - a. Personnel transmissions shall be made with consideration for the needs to reasonably manage resources for all agencies responding.
 - b. While Personnel response for agency knowledge of manpower may be relevant, excessive communications from Personnel portables shall not be permitted.
 2. For dispatched agencies for a 1st Alarm or greater, apparatus only shall report status on radio.
- ii. Messages Transmitted from Apparatus (Mobile or Portable Assigned to Apparatus)
 1. Apparatus status changes shall be reported to the Communications Center to indicate they are responding.

- a. It is acceptable for the number of crew members to also be reported for accountability and manpower resources to be known. *Example: "Forty-eleven responding; Crew of four."*
 - i. Terms such as "light" and "heavy" are not acceptable.
- b. It is acceptable for the apparatus response to also indicate the location from which they are responding if it is from a location other than their home station. *Example being an EMS Unit responding from a hospital rather than their station.*

2. On-Scene Communications

- a. Incident Command must be assumed by the first responder on location.
 - i. Incident Command (IC) shall be identified as the appropriate 2-digit ESN followed by "Command." *For example, the IC for an incident in Forks Township shall be identified as "25 Command."*
 - ii. In the event of two simultaneous incidents within the same municipality, IC shall be differentiated by the location. *For example, independent incidents on Zucksville Road and Sullivan Trail shall be identified as "Zucksville Road Command" and "Sullivan Trail Command."*
 - b. The Communications Center will accept requests for additional resources from Incident Command or his/her designee.
 - i. In the event additional resources are requested, Incident Command shall communicate the designated Staging Area to the Communications Center.
 - c. Incident Command may request additional frequency(ies) as the complexity of the incident expands to accommodate other Divisions/Branches of the ICS Structure as delegated. *For example, Water Supply Operations, etc.*
 - i. Frequencies will be assigned by the Communications Center.
 - d. The Incident Commander shall assume responsibility for coordinating appropriate communications for on-scene assignments, whether it be him/herself or delegated to another role within the ICS structure.
- iii. Common Messages of Importance
- 1. "Assume(ing) Command" – Unit is acknowledging his/herself as the Incident Commander
 - 2. "Transferring Command" – Unit is reporting that Incident Command is being assumed by another Unit

3. "Command Terminated" – Unit is reporting that Incident Command responsibilities have ceased
4. "PAR" – Personnel Accountability Report
5. "Fire Under Control" – The spread of the fire has been stopped.
6. "Fire Extinguished" – The fire is out.
7. "Extrication Complete (patient 1, etc.)" – Patient is free from entrapment.
8. "Aircraft (status)" – Unit requesting aeromedical "stand-by" or "flight."
9. "Affirmative" and "Negative" – In lieu of "yes" or "no."

f. Priority Transmissions

- i. In the event a message of importance needs to be relayed, the unit shall indicate "Priority" in the message, along with the need for priority acknowledgement. Acceptable priority transmissions include requests for additional personnel, equipment or apparatus, reports of emergencies that cannot be reported via 911, etc. *Example: "Fifty-two fifty-one to County, Priority. Report of a Motor Vehicle Accident with Injuries."*
- ii. In the event of an audible Emergency priority transmission, for example a "Mayday," during fire operations, all other radio traffic un-related shall cease. The Telecommunicator shall simul-select any channels in use pertinent to that incident's operation, activate a Steady Alert Tone and relay the message, "[Northampton] County to [Command], [Type of Emergency Alert] from [Unit as identified] [any other pertinent information.]"
 1. Incident Command shall acknowledge and provide further directions for action as necessary.

E. Channels of Operation

- a. Radio Channel assignments shall be determined by the Communications Center based on the type of incident, location of the incident, and the availability of frequencies at the time of the incident for safe operations.
 - i. EMS Incidents
 1. Incidents are generally handled on OPS 1 and OPS 2.
 - a. Geographical consideration is given as to which channel is best suited for the EMS agency as well as other responding agencies.
 2. Fire and other support agencies responding shall communicate on the same frequency as the EMS agency.
 - ii. Fire Incidents
 1. Incidents are generally assigned to a TAC or OPS channel which would appropriately provide the necessary coverage for the
 - a. Geographical consideration is given as to which channel is best suited for the EMS agency as well as other responding agencies.
 2. EMS and other support agencies responding shall communicate on the same frequency as the Fire agency.

iii. Multiple Incidents

1. Radio communications for multiple incidents being handled on one frequency shall be done in a manner that is with consideration to necessary radio traffic and awareness as to not interfere with other agencies' communications.
2. Channel assignments shall be considered based on the agency needs to maintain awareness of several incidents within their jurisdiction.

iv. Additional Alarms

1. Apparatus responding as a recommendation under a First Alarm or greater response to an incident shall be coordinated on a channel other than the one assigned to the incident itself.
 - a. Once on location, the unit shall switch to the designated channel of operation.
 - b. Assignments of incoming apparatus shall be coordinated on scene at the Staging Area.
2. Responders are encouraged to maintain a geographical awareness of response areas, however if there is a need for directions to be obtained, the request may be made by the unit, and they will be advised if it will be necessary to communicate the information on a different channel.

F. Limitation to Radio Traffic

- a. In times of excessive call volume, it may be determined by the Deputy Director for 911 Operations or his/her designee to limit radio traffic. An example of an acceptable contributing factor would be severe adverse weather. Other consideration shall be made with regard to sudden increased call volume due to a multitude of independent events or a large-scale single event.
 - i. In the event that limitation of radio traffic is necessary, a "Steady Alert" tone shall precede the message, "[Northampton] County to all Agencies operating [channels], limited radio traffic until further notice. [Time]"
 1. During times of "Limited Radio Traffic" one (1) portable per incident from primary responders and apparatus only shall report on radio.
 2. Agency leaderships may be contacted and other notification efforts coordinated for non-emergency events such as pump details, etc.
 - ii. Normal radio communications will be resumed as determined by the Deputy Director for 911 Operations or his/her designee.
 1. An announcement preceded by the "Steady Alert" tone will be made stating, "[Northampton] County to all Agencies operating [channels], resume normal radio communications. [Time]."

G. Agency Responsibilities

- a. It shall be the Chief Officer's responsibility to ensure that personnel within his/her agency abide by the Northampton County Radio Use Policy and Procedures.
- b. Each Public Safety Agency is encouraged to maintain an agency-specific SOP/SOG for radio communications. It is recommended that agency SOPs/SOGs also include

accessibility and communication guidelines for other channels available outside of the Northampton County licensed frequencies, i.e. private channels.

H. Violations

- a. In the event violations to this policy occur, a documented report shall be presented to the Operations & Training Manager for 911 who shall investigate the alleged violation.
 - i. If a violation is legitimized, an Administrative review will be conducted.
 1. The Chief Officer of that agency will be informed of the violation.
 - a. In the event of a first offense, it shall be the responsibility of the Chief Officer to confirm that the violation was addressed at the agency level.
 - b. Repeated violations of similar nature by the same agency or individual may be referred to the agency's municipality.
 2. Violations of FCC Regulations or are deemed potentially criminal in nature shall be referred to the appropriate agency/agencies by the Division of Emergency Management Services for further investigation.

