



# Engaging COMLS and Communication Plans for Large Events

September 10, 2020

## Overview

As we approach November's presidential election, the emergency communications community should be prepared for short-notice visits by political candidates. This memo serves as a reminder that Statewide Emergency Communications Board (SECB) Event and Exercise Planning standard provides specific guidance for events that utilize ARMER resources, especially for those utilizing more than one statewide interoperability talkgroup.

## Recommendations

### Understand and Follow Event and Exercising Standard IOP-27

Familiarize yourself with SECB standard IOP-27 (legacy #3.17.4), Event and Exercise Planning; a copy of this standard is attached to this memo. This standard ensures that subject matter experts are engaged to develop an effective and efficient communications plan for an event that is as minimally disruptive to communication resources as possible. A planned or surprise visit by a major political candidate fits within the intent of this standard.

Standard IOP-27 specifically guides the following:

- A Communications Unit Leader (COML) should be engaged if intending to use more than one statewide interoperability talkgroup.
- When utilizing a COML, an ICS-205 Communications Plan should be developed and distributed to impacted entities.
- Event planners shall engage the impacted local entities' ARMER System Administrators.
- StatusBoard must be utilized.

### Utilize Communications Unit Leaders

COMLs have been trained to understand operational and technical communication needs of planned and emergent incidents. They can assist in managing communication needs and in identifying support resources. The event does not need to use multiple state resources. A COML may be engaged for events using just regional resources.

Minnesota recognizes many COMLs, most of whom work for local entities across the state. If you do not know a COML that supports your entity, the following resources can assist you in identifying a COML to assist you:

- Emergency Manager of your entity or your [county](#)
- [Regional Interoperability Coordinator](#)
- [Regional Emergency Communications/Services Board](#)
- [Minnesota Duty Officer](#) (651-649-5451)

### Implement a Communications Plan (ICS-205s)

An ICS-205 Communications Plan is a written document that identifies communication methods of an incident such as who is using which radio channels/talkgroups. Such a document is intended to be shared with incident

leadership, participants, and other impacted entities so that all understand who they will communicate with one another. COMLs are trained in how to develop and implement Communication Plans.

#### Engage ARMER System Administrators

ARMER System administrators play a vital role in keeping your emergency communications systems functioning day-to-day and during large scale events. They understand very technical aspects of the ARMER radio system and can assist you in making wise decisions about operational use of ARMER.

#### Utilize StatusBoard

The StatusBoard application provides situational awareness to other communications personnel in emergent situations and complements an ISC-205 Communications Plan in planned or long-term events. It not only allows you to claim and reserve radio resources but it allows other communications personnel to understand what resources are in use and what resources remain available.

### **Questions**

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Please share this document with dispatch personnel, technical personnel, and end users. If you or your public safety partners have any questions about SECB standards, how to prepare public safety communications for an event such as short-notice visit by a political candidate, or how to engage any of the resources identified in this document, please reach out for help.

The following personnel are available to assist you:

- Regional Interoperability Coordinator Marcus Bruning (NW, NE, & ME regions)  
218-232-3762/[marcus.bruning@state.mn.us](mailto:marcus.bruning@state.mn.us)
- Regional Interoperability Coordinator Steve Tait (CM, SW, SC, & SE regions)  
612-221-6636/[steve.tait@state.mn.us](mailto:steve.tait@state.mn.us)
- Statewide Interoperability Coordinator Jim Stromberg  
651-201-7557/[james.stromberg@state.mn.us](mailto:james.stromberg@state.mn.us)
- Minnesota Department of Public Safety division of Emergency Communication Networks  
651-201-7546/[ecn@state.mn.us](mailto:ecn@state.mn.us)

# Allied Radio Matrix for Emergency Response (ARMER) Standards, Protocols, Procedures

Document Section 3	<b>Interoperability Standards</b>	<b>Status:</b> Approved
State Standard Number	<b>3.17.4</b>	
Standard Title	<b>Event and Exercise Communications Planning</b>	
Date Established	<b>09/25/2013</b>	<b>SRB Approval:</b> 01/24/2019
Replaces Document Dated	<b>12/19/2013</b>	
Date Revised	<b>01/24/2019</b>	

## **1. Purpose or Objective**

The purpose of this standard is to establish protocols and procedures to be used for planning communications for full-scale or functional exercises and pre-planned events that affect multiple agencies or jurisdictions.

## **2. Operational Background**

Full-scale or functional exercises and pre-planned events that include multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency disciplines, and use of more than one statewide interoperability talkgroup require an All-Hazards, Type III Communications Unit Leader (COML) to establish a communication plan.

A full-scale exercise (FSE) is a multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional, multi-discipline exercise involving a functional and/or field unit response. A functional response could include a joint field office, emergency operations center (EOC), etc. A field unit response could include firefighters or other first responders at a scene, along with mock victims, etc.

A functional exercise (FE) examines and/or validates the coordination, command, and control between various multi-agency coordination centers, such as an EOC, joint field office, etc. A functional exercise does not involve any field unit responders.

Refer to State Standard 3.48.0 (Communications Unit) and the Minnesota Communications Unit Standard Operating Guidelines for additional information about COMLs.

## **3. Operational Context**

Full-scale or functional exercises and pre-planned events of any size can include complex communications issues. There is also a potential for any event to grow quickly into a large-scale incident.

Since full-scale/functional exercises and pre-planned events have the potential to affect system capacity, a COML should ensure that the event does not inadvertently affect normal, daily operational needs by over-utilization and/or overloading of ARMER system resources.

# **Allied Radio Matrix for Emergency Response (ARMER) Standards, Protocols, Procedures**

## **4. Recommended Procedure**

When an entity develops a plan for a full-scale/functional exercise or pre-planned event that involves the use of ARMER resources, these procedures will be followed:

- StatusBoard must be utilized. When the exercise or event is planned farther out than seven days, the requested resource should be reserved on the StatusBoard at least one week in advance.
- Exercise or event planners shall include the impacted local entities' (city or county) ARMER System Administrators in the exercise development process from the beginning so local system resources are properly informed and utilized.
- Exercise or event planners intending to use more than one statewide interoperability talkgroup shall engage a Minnesota-recognized COML.
- A COML engaged for an exercise or event during which planners intend to use more than one statewide interoperability talkgroup shall complete or approve an ICS-205 Communications Plan and that plan should be distributed to the ARMER System Administrators of impacted local entities, the Chairs of the Regional Advisory Committees (Radio Technical Operations Committee in the case of the Metro region) of the impacted Emergency Communications/Services Board regions, the applicable Regional Interoperability Coordinator, and the Statewide Interoperability Coordinator.
- A COML engaged for an exercise or event during which planners intend to use more than one statewide interoperability talkgroup should take into consideration the home zone mapping, priority levels, and site access approvals of talkgroups being considered as well as the channel count and capacity of impacted repeater sites.

If the event or exercise planner deems the services of a COML necessary but does not have access to one, the Minnesota Duty Officer should be contacted.

## **5. Management**

The system managers, administrators, and users will all be responsible to see that this policy is implemented as defined. Identified issues and concerns will be brought to the Interoperability Committee (IOC) for resolution. Maintenance of this standard will be the responsibility of the Statewide Interoperability Coordinator.