



# Minnesota Dispatchers

## Communications Best Practice Guide

**Statewide Radio Board, Operations & Technical Committee, Interoperability  
Committee, Dispatch Best Practice Workgroup**

Approved by the Statewide Emergency Communications Board

March 24, 2016

This document describes the recommended best practice, standards, and contact information for Minnesota dispatchers to assist in planning for interoperability with other public safety disciplines.



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### DOCUMENT REVISION HISTORY

<b>Date</b>	<b>Revision</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Name</b>
5-17-2013	Removed Tom Johnson Added NWS standard info	Replaced with Brandon Abley	Cathy Anderson
1-8-2016	Revision to entire guide	Approved by SECB 3-24-16	Workgroup



## Section I: Introduction

The Dispatcher Best Practice Workgroup was created in 2012 to develop a Best Practice Guide for those who serve in the role of dispatcher. Dispatchers provide a vital role in the delivery of public safety services. This guide is designed to serve as both a training plan and a resource document. The Minnesota Dispatchers Communications Best Practice Guide is a living document, and suggested changes may be submitted to the Emergency Communication Networks (ECN) Standards & Training Coordinator.

NOTE: Questions regarding State Standards or clarification of these standards should be directed to your Local System Administrator, your Regional Interoperability Coordinator (RIC), or the Statewide Interoperability Program Manager.

For current email contact information, please see Staff Contacts on the ECN website under “Contact:” <https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ecn/Pages/default.aspx>

## Section II ARMER Basics for Dispatchers

### State Standard 1.11.3, Training Dispatchers

Each agency operating on the ARMER system is responsible for the training of their personnel and compliance with State, Regional, and Local Operating Standards and should customize their training plan to fit their own unique situation.

Dispatch personnel shall successfully complete, at a minimum, training on the console system installed by the user agency, as well as topics listed in State Standard 1.11.3.

Dispatch personnel shall be familiar with all applicable mutual aid and interop requirements of this Standards manual and all established standard operating procedures developed by their agencies.

### State Standard 1.11.5, Training Interoperability Participants

Radio operators shall have successfully completed appropriate training and demonstrate knowledge of Section 3, Interoperability Guidelines.

Radio operators with access to interoperability channels shall be familiar with all applicable mutual aid and interoperability requirements in this procedure manual, as well as any established, standard interoperability operating procedures developed by their agency.

See State Standard 1.11.5 for specific requirements, listed under Section 4, Recommended Protocol/Standard.

### Suggested supplemental training to the required training listed in State Standards 1.11.3 and 1.11.5:

It is highly recommended that Dispatchers view training modules, created on behalf of the Statewide Emergency Communications Board (SECB) and reviewed and approved by subject matter experts. These



training modules are hosted through the Alexandria Technical & Community College online website. They can be accessed from ECN's website under ARMER Standards.

A user name and password will be needed for these training modules, and instructions for obtaining these are posted on ECN's website under ARMER Standards. While web-based training is supplemental, except for the Minimum Training Requirements, all users must attend formal training for the ARMER system.

#### Alexandria Technical & Community College Training Modules

- Radio 101
- History of ARMER
- Interoperability 101
- CentraComm Dispatch Console, Part I (until 5/15/2016)
- CentraComm Dispatch Console, Part II (until 5/15/2016)
- MCC7500 Dispatch Console, Part I
- MCC7500 Dispatch Console, Part II
- ARMER Control Stations
- EF Johnson, Parts 1-4, if applicable
- Patching and Multi Select
- Encryption
  - Shared or Private
  - Selectable
- Paging
- Channel Markers
- Motobridge
- StatusBoard 2.0 End User Training
- StatusBoard 2.0 Administrator Training, if applicable
- Other relevant modules as developed

#### **FEMA/NIMS:**

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) provides a systematic, proactive approach to guide departments and agencies at all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector to work seamlessly to prevent, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of incidents, regardless of cause, size, location, or complexity, in order to reduce the loss of life and property and harm to the environment. Each agency should design ongoing NIMS training, which should complement other training initiatives. NIMS should not be considered a stand-alone training curriculum.

NIMS training courses can be found at:

<http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/NIMSTrainingCourses.shtm>

- IS-100.b, Introduction to the Incident Command System (ICS 100) (Required)
- IS-700.a, National Incident Management System (NIMS), An Introduction (Required)
- IS-200.b, ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents (ICS200) (Required)



Attending Field User ARMER Training: Information about local field user training may be obtained through your local System Administrator or Regional Advisory Committee (RAC).

### **State Standard 2.8.0, Talkgroup and Radio User Priority**

Priority levels in the system will be managed at the talkgroup level. Distributing priorities at the talkgroup level will maximize critical communications capabilities, while minimizing the number of high priority talkgroups. All user priorities will be set to the lowest priority level, which is 10.

As radio users change talkgroups, their effective priority will be set by the talkgroup they are on.

### **State Standard 2.14.0, Private Call**

The private call resource should primarily be used as a supervisory function. If there is a business need for a radio user to have this ability, the owning agency shall request the feature, in writing, to the local System Administrator. Private Call needs to be managed to protect site radio channel resources. This is also a function that dispatch consoles are capable of.

### **State Standard 2.16.0, Emergency Button**

In conjunction with the review of Standard 2.16.0 – Emergency Button, personnel conducting the training, or review, should also review the Agency’s “Emergency Button Response Plan.” This plan is required of all agencies that have chosen to configure the Emergency Button for use. Having such a plan provides end users and dispatchers with the background and knowledge they need to act appropriately when the emergency button is activated. It is recommended that “Emergency Button Response Plan” be reviewed during initial training, as well as at all refresher training sessions.

Language from the standard:

- All agencies implementing the Emergency Button must have a plan in place to respond to Emergency Button activation.
- All Emergency Button response plans must include, at minimum:
  - A central radio monitoring point that can identify which radio user pushed the key, the location and nature of the emergency, and what the proper agency response should be.
  - A central monitoring point must be available during any/all hours that personnel are using the radio system.
  - A policy for use of the Emergency Button by radio users.
  - A response plan to assist the radio user in need.
  - In the event the central radio monitoring point is not the same agency as the radio user, an agreement on policy, monitoring, use, and response, must be in place among the agencies.

\*In the event the central radio monitoring point is not the same agency as the radio user, an agreement on policy, monitoring, use, and response must be in place among the agencies



## Section III: ARMER Console Operation

Although Public Safety Answering Points may have different types of dispatch consoles, the ultimate goal remains identical – to obtain details from callers and send appropriate help in a timely manner.

This section contains information about several topics, including which online training will be the most beneficial for dispatchers. Training modules will contain specifics about consoles and control stations used on the ARMER system, along with much more information.

It is important to note that these online training modules are intended to be used for refresher, or pre-hands-on, training. The modules are not expected to take the place of classroom training about how to use equipment.

Online training will include information about CentraComm, MCC7500 dispatch consoles, and Motobridge. The training will cover tasks like Patching/Multi-Select, Encryption, and Paging.

Channel markers are not covered in the online training, but they are designed to provide a short beep over radio channels to notify listeners a “special event” is in progress, and radio transmissions should be kept to a minimum. Special events would involve officer and/or public safety. The beep tone is timed and adjustable. Check with your agency for their policy on the use of channel markers.

Call Alert is another function not covered in the online training, but it allows a dispatcher to page a portable or mobile radio. Paging a radio does not tie up a frequency or lock the radio up when it gets paged. Each PSAP shall ensure that their dispatchers are familiar with this capability.

## Section IV: Interoperability

This section will consist of state standards that are most pertinent to your job as a dispatcher. Take the time to become familiar with each of them. While they are written as standards, it is recommended that your agency determine the best way to incorporate these, as well as additional training, into your agency’s program as a way to enhance the information set forth in the Minnesota Dispatchers Communications Best Practice Guide.

### Minnesota Public Safety VHF Interoperability Frequency Plan

The Minnesota VHF Interoperability Frequency plan may be found on the SECB website. Dispatch personnel should be familiar with the regional communications resources that are available to their jurisdiction, as well as the process they must follow to request them. This information will be provided in the region’s Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan (TICP) and should also be listed in CASM – the Communications Assets Survey and Mapping Tool. PSAP managers should consider providing TICP information and/or CASM information to dispatch personnel in a readily accessible format.



### **Tactical Interoperable Communications Plan (TICP)**

Tactical Interoperable Communications Plans are used by jurisdictions to document interoperable communications governance structures, technology resources, and usage policies/procedures. The TICP describes what interoperable communications assets are available in an area, how those assets are shared and prioritized, and the steps that individual agencies should use to request, activate, and deactivate them.

### **Communications Assets Survey and Mapping Tool (CASM)**

CASM is a web-based software application that enables communication planners to survey and inventory existing Land Mobile Radio (LMR) communication equipment and infrastructure in a state or urban area. It provides a single repository for information about LMR systems, methods of interoperability, and how they are used by emergency responders. CASM is available nationwide and provides inter-agency interoperability analysis. CASM is an important tool for public safety during an incident or exercise anywhere in the state of Minnesota. See State Standard 3.40.0, CASM Standard for Data Entry and Maintenance. For more information on CASM, go to <http://www.in.gov/ipsc/2529.htm>

### **Motobridge Consoles**

In an effort to augment interoperability between ARMER talkgroups and VHF resources, the state of Minnesota has implemented a VHF overlay system to ARMER. Motobridge consoles have been built and installed in several PSAPs, including the counties of St. Louis and Otter Tail, as well as the Minnesota State Patrol Regional Dispatch Centers. Motobridge consoles have the unique ability to apply soft patches between VHF resources and ARMER talkgroups at specific ARMER comm sites. The specific VHF interoperability resources are defined in the MN VHF Interoperable Frequency Plan, which can be found in Studies and Reports on the ARMER home page. The specific ARMER comm sites that house variable frequency stations (VFS) are listed in appendix A of Standard 3.16.5.

### **MNFOG**

The Minnesota Communications Field Operations Guide (MNFOG) is a collection of technical reference material to aid communications unit personnel in establishing solutions to support communications during emergency incidents and planned events. The MNFOG also contains local, state, and national interoperability channel information.

Printed copies for field use can be obtained by contacting the State Interoperability Program Manager.

Electronic access can be found by going to the ECN website under ARMER and Guide Books or by downloading the OEC/ICTAP Public Safety Tools Library App to your smart phone or tablet. Within the App, you will be able to see the published documents for the state of Minnesota, which contains the MNFOG.

### **State Standard 3.16.0, 800 MHz Statewide STAC Interoperability Talkgroups**

Dispatch personnel should be familiar with these statewide talkgroup resources and understand the circumstances when they would be used.

Important points that should be emphasized for PSAPs:

- Use in order (i.e., 1,2,3,4, etc.) for emergent events



- Use in reverse order (12, 11, 10, 9, etc.) for preplanned and non-emergent events. For PSAPs that do not have all twelve STACs, use in reverse order starting at largest number available to you (i.e. 4, 3, 2, 1)
- Clear speech only - no "10" codes on statewide or regional talkgroups
- Priority of use should be for incidents with responders from multiple regions
- StatusBoard tracking: clear the statewide talkgroup verbally when the incident is over and update the StatusBoard
- It is recommended that dispatchers have reference material available describing where the statewide talkgroups are in responder radios

### **State Standard 3.16.2, Use of Statewide 800MHz STAC 1-12 Talkgroups - Air Ambulance Emergency Landing Zone Coordination**

Dispatch personnel should understand the communications procedure for landing an air ambulance at their incident and be prepared to assist the incident commander with the process.

Dispatchers should understand the different resources necessary for this function, depending on whether or not the air ambulance has ARMER radio capabilities.

Reference material should be developed for each PSAP describing the radio capabilities for air ambulances that commonly respond in their jurisdiction.

### **State Standard 3.16.3, Cross Spectrum Interoperability System (CSIS) 800 MHz National Mutual Aid Resources**

The purpose of this standard is to establish procedures for use and patching of 800 MHz national mutual aid resources included in the ARMER Cross Spectrum Interoperability System for interagency communications.

### **State Standard 3.16.4, Cross Spectrum Interoperability System VLAW31 Resources**

The purpose of this standard is to establish procedures for use and patching of VLAW31 resources included in the ARMER Cross Spectrum Interoperability System for interagency communications.

### **State Standard 3.16.5, Cross Spectrum Interoperability System VHF Variable Frequency Station (VFS) Resources**

The purpose of this standard is to establish procedures for use and patching of VHF Variable Frequency Station (VFS) resources included in the ARMER Cross Spectrum Interoperability System for interagency communications.

The most common VHF channels that are available to law enforcement are:

- VLAW31
- VFIR23
- VMED28
- MNCOMM

Others may be available as well, such as the National Interoperability Channels VCALL10 and VTAC11-14.



Local procedures should be developed that list the specific scenarios in which VHF channels would be needed.

For PSAPs where patching is infrequent, step-by-step procedures in a quick-reference format should be developed so that dispatch staff can perform this function when necessary.

### **State Standard 3.19.0, Use of 800 MHz Statewide LTAC and SIU Interoperability Talkgroups**

Dispatch centers will not have LE\_SIUs.

If a PSAP has LTAC5E through LTAC8E, dispatch staff must not patch them to anything.

The StatusBoard must be used to reserve these resources.

### **State Standard 3.31.0, ARMER System StatusBoard**

This standard will give guidance to all ARMER dispatch centers as to what talkgroups or channels should be on their StatusBoard Application and will serve to minimize usage conflicts when multiple incidents may be occurring simultaneously.

The StatusBoard shall be used for all emergent events or pre-planned exercises. It is available to all PSAPs via internet access. Basic procedures on usage of the StatusBoard should be developed by each agency and made readily accessible to dispatchers and other end-users.

Every dispatcher should be familiar with the contents of this standard and must complete the online training module for StatusBoard prior to getting an individual log on and password.

### **State Standard 3.32.0, Statewide Interoperable Plain Language Policy**

It is recommended that PSAP communications plans be developed, requiring clear speech for day-to-day activities. A limited list of permitted codes should be published for users and be strictly adhered to. This will make it easier to use clear speech only on major events as well.

### **State Standard 3.44.0, Statewide Pursuit Communications Standard**

The purpose of this standard is to establish the guidelines and procedures for pursuit communications. Upon initiating the pursuit on a local talkgroup, the controlling dispatcher will patch the local talkgroup to the first available LTAC and reserve the LTAC via the StatusBoard. Upon placing the patch, the controlling dispatcher will announce the patch and the reason for the patch. If VHF resources are to be involved, VLAW31 will be patched with the local talkgroup and the first available LTAC. If the pursuit is going to extend past the local PSAP's VLAW31 coverage, the nearest State Patrol Regional Dispatch Center should be contacted to apply the patch outside the local coverage area. Once the pursuit has been completed, the original, controlling dispatcher will announce the removal of the patch, remove the patch, and update the StatusBoard.



### **State Standard 3.35.0, National Weather Service Standard**

The purpose of this standard is to define the ARMER talkgroups and procedures to be used by the National Weather Service (NWS) offices that serve the various ARMER regions of the state for NWS to county and local agency communications during severe weather events.

## **Section V: Other Resources**

### **State Standard 3.33.0, Establishment of Strategic Technology Reserve (STR), 3.33.1 STR Radio Cache and 3.33.2 STR- Transportable Tower/Repeater**

The basic purpose of a Minnesota STR is to provide communication resources that can be deployed in situations where there is a catastrophic loss of the existing public safety communication capabilities. Each of the seven communications regions in Minnesota has an STR to:

- Provide communication resources that can be deployed in situations where there is a catastrophic loss of existing public safety communication capabilities.
- Provide communication resources that can be used to supplement existing public safety communication resources where an event or natural disaster requires more resources and capability than are currently available locally or regionally.
- Provide a transportable communications resource that can be used to support operations of local public safety officials responding to a serious event or natural disaster to another state.

It is suggested that each PSAP insert or link the applicable Regional STR Standard to this document.

### **Communications Unit Leader (COML) and Communications Unit Technician (COMT)**

During all-hazards emergency response operations, communications among multiple jurisdictions and disciplines, including emergency medical, fire, and law enforcement, is essential. Unfortunately, the absence of on-scene communications coordination has often compromised critical operations. To close this gap, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Emergency Communications (OEC), in partnership with the Office of Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), National Integration Center (NIC), and practitioners from across the country, developed performance and training standards for the All Hazards Type III COML & COMT, formulating the curriculum and comprehensive All Hazards Type III COML & COMT courses. See State Standard 3.17.0, Criteria for State Certification as a Communications Unit Leader, State Standard 3.17.2, Statewide COML Talkgroup, and State Standard 3.17.4, Event and Exercise Communications Planning for additional information.

### **Communications Unit Leader (COML)**

COML responsibilities include developing plans for the effective use of incident communications equipment and facilities, managing the distribution of communications equipment to incident personnel, and coordinating the installation and testing of communications equipment. See State Standard 3.17.0 for more information.

Full-scale/functional exercises or pre-planned events using more than one statewide interoperability talkgroup must utilize the services of a Minnesota certified COML.



### **Communications Unit Technician (COMT)**

The All-Hazards Communications Technician, or COMT, is responsible for practices and procedures common to radio communications technicians during all-hazards emergency operations. COMTs work within the Incident Command System (ICS) organizational structure. See State Standard 3.17.3, Criteria for State Certification as a Communications Technician for more information.

### **Incident Management Team (IMT)**

An Incident Management Team, (IMT), is a multi-agency/multi-jurisdiction team for extended incidents, formed and managed at the State, regional, or metropolitan level. An IMT is deployed as a team of 8-24 trained personnel to manage major and/or complex incidents requiring a significant amount of local, regional, and state resources, as well as incidents that extend into multiple operational periods and require a written Incident Action Plan (IAP).

### **Communications Response Task Force (CRTF)**

The Metro Region CRTF is an ICS trained, all-hazard personnel resource to be used by an agency to assist in the field, the command post, the EOC, or the PSAP. The CRTF can be an expertise or personnel resource and may assist with logistics if the communications or other equipment is necessary. The team will assume radio duties for the incident or event and can be a resource to support troubleshooting and managing equipment or documentation and resource deployment.

### **Incident Dispatch Team (IDT)**

The IDT is comprised of dispatch professionals from around the Metro Region. The team represents multi-discipline PSAP personnel (police fire, EMS) ready to deploy and bring the unique skills of the dispatcher to augment incident management at an incident or event. The IDT also serves as Minnesota's Telecommunications Emergency Response Taskforce (MN-TERT) under the National Joint TERT Initiative and is recognized nationally.

The Metropolitan Emergency Services Board (MESB) supports the CRTF and IDT/MN-TERT. The CRTF or MN-TERT can be requested for assistance at an emergency event by contacting the Minnesota State Duty Officer. If you have a planned event, please contact the MESB to make arrangements for the IDT.

## **Section VI: Compliance and Conflict Resolution**

The suggested method for reporting conflicts noticed by dispatchers is to attempt a resolution through direct contact with the PSAP or dispatcher involved. If direct contact with the PSAP or dispatcher is not an option, the issue should be documented and forwarded to your supervisor. The supervisor or PSAP manager should attempt to obtain a resolution with the other PSAP. However, for Greater MN, if a conflict is not able to be resolved at this level, the issue should be brought to the regional user/owner and operator committee level. For more information, see State Standards 7.1.0, 7.2.0, and 7.3.0. For the Metro area, see Metro Region Standard 7.2.0, Response to Non-Compliance.

## **Section VII: Refresher Training Plan**

While it is the responsibility of each agency to establish their own dispatch refresher training at least every two years, it is imperative to keep personnel up-to-date on the latest technological innovations, as well as applicable local, regional, and state guidelines/mandates.



It is a best practice recommendation that ARMER online equipment and console training modules be reviewed annually, at a minimum. In addition, the Minnesota Dispatchers Communications Best Practice Guide should become part of every agency's new trainee curriculum, and it should also be reviewed periodically in training sessions for current employees.

Online training modules are available to all users. These courses, created on behalf of the Statewide Emergency Communications Board (SECB) and reviewed and approved by subject matter experts, are hosted through the Alexandria Technical & Community College online website. They can be accessed from ECN's website under ARMER Standards.

A user name and password will be needed for these training modules, and instructions for obtaining these are posted on ECN's website under ARMER standards.

## **Section VIII: Other Best Practice Guides**

Fire

Emergency Management/Public Health

Dispatch

Public Works

EMS/Hospitals

These guides have been created as a result of diligent work by the groups involved. These guides provide direction for their respective public safety disciplines and are available online. Access to completed Best Practice Guides is available on ECN's website under ARMER and Guide Books.

## **Section IX: Minnesota Emergency Communication Networks Contacts**

For current email contact information, please see Staff Contacts on the ECN website.

## **Section X: Regional Emergency Communications Boards/Emergency Services Boards and Advisory Committee Contacts**

Contacts for the Regional Emergency Communications Boards/Emergency Services Boards (ECB/ESB) and Regional Advisory Committees (RAC) can be found on the SECB website under Regional Boards and Committees.

## **Section XI: Radio Affiliated Acronyms**

Link to commonly used radio affiliated acronyms – <https://dps.mn.gov/entity/SRB> , click on ARMER and then click on Acronyms.