

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

Document Section 3	<b>Interoperability Standards</b>	<b>Status:</b> Complete
State Standard Number	<b>3.16.0</b>	
Standard Title	<b>800 MHz Statewide STAC Interoperability Talkgroups</b>	
Date Established		<b>SRB Approval:</b> 3/28/2013 (effective 11/22/2013)
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### **1. Purpose or Objective**

The purpose of this standard is to establish policy and procedures for use of uniform, statewide 800 MHz interoperability STAC talkgroups in all user radios. The statewide interoperability talkgroups are a system wide resource intended to facilitate communications among and between different agencies and service branches which need to coordinate their operations during major incidents, pre-planned events, and task force operations. These resources are not intended for localized day-to-day interoperability.

This policy will provide standardized incident response radio communications capabilities for all service branches and, most importantly, will support the redeployment of mutual aid resources throughout the state. This policy will provide the radio communications structure necessary to enable effective situational awareness, command and control, and resource coordination in support of the incident command and management structure specified under the National Incident Management System (NIMS). This policy will also serve to minimize usage conflicts when statewide interoperability talkgroups are needed for multiple incidents.

### **2. Technical Background**

#### **▪ Capabilities**

A single group of uniform, universally available statewide 800 MHz interoperability STAC talkgroups provides the highest level of interoperability. Lower and less effective levels of interoperability include switching to shared conventional frequencies, dispatch console patches, deployable portable gateways, and radio caches (swap radios).

#### **▪ Constraints**

The availability of and the use of the statewide incident response talkgroups must be easily understood by radio user personnel, who are primarily concerned with their mission and not with the operation of complex radios under stressful conditions. Standardization of capabilities will provide responding agencies with an assurance that they will have operational compatibility with any other agency they need to work with.

### **3. Operational Context**

Universal access to the 12 non-encrypted STAC talkgroups by all end-users and dispatch centers, as well as two encrypted STACs for all users with Data Encryption Standard (DES) equipped radios and Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), guarantees fully compatible, interoperable communications among agencies and service branches for major incidents, pre-planned events, and task force operations.

### **4. Standardized Policy**

#### **STAC TALKGROUPS – ALL USERS**

<b><u>TG Requirements</u></b>	<b><u>For Whom?</u></b>
<u>Required</u>	<u>All ARMER Users – All Radios – All PSAPs (STAC13E &amp;14E required in all DES equipped radios &amp; PSAPs)</u>
<u>Recommended</u>	<u>N/A</u>
<u>Optional</u>	<u>N/A</u>
<u>Not Allowed</u>	
<u>Site Access</u>	<u>System Wide – All Sites</u>

<b><u>Cross Patch Standard</u></b>	<b><u>YES / NO</u></b>	<b><u>To Talk Groups</u></b>
<u>Soft Patch</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>As Needed</u>
<u>Hard Patch</u>	<u>No</u>	

#### **Primary Intended Use**

STACs should be used as the primary resource for major mutual aid incidents involving joint response from multiple agencies and/or service branches.

#### **Best Practices Encouraged**

Agencies are encouraged to follow practices outlined by the US Department of Homeland Security (HSEM) SAFECOM Program. Key elements of SAFECOM include:

- Regional and statewide interoperability Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for incident response should be developed and should be molded to conform to the elements of NIMS.
- Users should be provided with regular comprehensive training on the interoperability SOPs.
- Interoperability SOPs should be tested through realistic exercises to address potential problems.
- The interoperability systems and SOPs should be used every day for managing routine and emergency incidents requiring interoperability. In this optimal solution, users are familiar with the operation of the system and routinely work together.
- Trained Communications Unit Leaders (COMLs) should be developed to assist with incident pre-plans and to provide on-scene incident support by managing communications using available, technical solutions at larger or unexpected interoperability incidents.

#### **Incident Scope and Geographic Area**

The shared, statewide incident response talkgroups are available for use in incidents anywhere the ARMER system provides geographic coverage, regardless of incident size or scale. Interoperability

incidents may be localized or dispersed in area. Participating incident personnel and resources may be localized, regional, statewide, or national. Incidents may be pre-planned or emergent in nature.

#### Secondary Intended Use

If other talkgroups are not available, the shared, statewide incident response talkgroups may be used for day-to-day and task force-type interoperability among multiple agencies.

#### Non-intended Use

The statewide talkgroups are not to be used for daily routine operations.

#### Priorities for Use and Multiple Incidents

In the event that multiple interoperability incidents occur simultaneously, exhausting the STAC talkgroups, assignment of STACs talkgroups in incident radio communications plans will be prioritized for: (1) mutual aid incidents, and (2) those incidents involving resources spanning multiple regions. Secondary use and localized or single region mutual aid incidents initially assigned to STAC talkgroups should be reassigned to regional or local coordination talkgroups. This reassignment will be coordinated between the affected incident commanders and dispatch centers controlling the incidents.

#### Console Resource Requirements and Patching

Integrated ARMER dispatch consoles (Gold Elite, MCC7500, etc.) shall have the STACs in the console configuration available for patching. If the patched talkgroups have different "home zones," multiple repeaters will be assigned, impacting system loading. Therefore, extended duration patching of statewide interoperability talkgroups to other talkgroups should be avoided. Users should transition to the statewide talkgroup as soon as it can be done safely, and the patch should be terminated. STACs should not be patched to other statewide interoperability talkgroups. In order to meet the communications needs for an event, the STAC talkgroups may be patched to:

- Conventional radio frequency (RF) resources, such as VHF, UHF, etc.
- Private agency talkgroups, such as dispatch mains, tactical talkgroups, pools, etc.
- Regional or local tactical talkgroups (TACs), although this would not be preferred as a method of resolving communications needs because it reduces the number of talkgroups available for an incident.

#### Assignment Tracking

The StatusBoard application on dispatch consoles shall be used to manage and track assignment of the statewide incident response talkgroup resources. Use of the NIMS/ ICS-205 Incident Radio Communications Plan format is highly recommended to assist with assignment tracking for pre-planned incidents, incidents utilizing more than one of the statewide talkgroups, and for incidents of long duration.

#### Multi-Group Prohibition

STAC talkgroups shall not be part of any multi-group.

### Shared, Encrypted Interoperability Talkgroups

New talkgroups STAC13E and STAC14E are encrypted-only talkgroups using the state assigned DES encryption key. Use of non-standardized encryption is not allowed. End users with DES equipped encrypted radios shall include these talkgroups in their Statewide Interoperability Zone. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) System Administrator will be responsible for managing the statewide DES encryption key.

## **5. Standardized Procedure**

### Notification

When a statewide talkgroup resource is needed, the requesting agency will contact the dispatch center controlling the incident, or Incident Commander (IC) as appropriate, to have the next preferred, available system wide talkgroup assigned.

### Order of Use

The usage of STAC talkgroups for **PREPLANNED NON-EMERGENCY** interoperability events should be STAC 12, 11, 10, 9, etc., in that order. **INTERIM: During the 24-month transition period when all users may not have all 12 STACs programmed in their radios, these non-emergency events should be assigned STAC 4, 3, 2, 1, in that order.**

The usage of STAC talkgroups for **UNPLANNED EMERGENCY INCIDENTS** should be STAC 1, 2, 3, 4, etc., in that order.

### Training Exercises

Use of STACs for training should be avoided unless used for a FULL SCALE EXERCISE.

### Dual Naming

Existing FTAC1 through FTAC4 are renamed STAC5 through STAC8; existing ETAC1 through ETAC4 are renamed STAC9 through STAC12. Dual names will be added to PSAP consoles and used for the renamed talkgroups and will remain in place for up to 24 months or until all affected ARMER radios have been reprogrammed. The old name will be primary for the first 12 months, then secondary for the following 12 months. Dual naming will be removed from PSAP consoles within three years.

### Unit Identification

When operating on the shared, statewide incident response talkgroups, users should initially identify in the following manner using plain English: agency name, followed by service branch or function designation, followed by call sign or unit number. Once established, ongoing communications between the same units may be shortened to agency name and unit number.

### Use of 10-Codes and Acronyms

The use of 10-codes, signals, unique acronyms, and other codes should not be used on the statewide interoperability talkgroups, because there is no standardized set of codes. Plain English should be used in all cases.

### Termination of Use

At the end of the event, the initiating dispatch center will remove any patches that were placed for the event, if any, and clear the status so other dispatchers will know this resource is available for use.

### **6. Management**

Dispatch Center Managers and Supervisors for agencies on the statewide ARMER system, Incident Commanders, and ICS Communications Unit Leaders shall ensure that the policy and procedure for usage and assignment of the STAC talkgroups is followed.

The MnDOT System Administrator shall be responsible for the StatusBoard application.

Dispatch center operators and Incident Command System (ICS) Communications Unit Leaders shall receive initial training and periodic refresher training on the use of this procedure.