

Franklin County Fire Chiefs Standard Operating Guideline		
Effective Date: January 1, 2015	SOG Category & Identification Number: Communications - 001	Revision:
SOG Title: Incident Communications – Radio Utilization		
Approved by:	Re-evaluation Date: January 1, 2018	Number of Pages: 5

PURPOSE:

To optimize the use of a countywide fire service communications system.

SCOPE:

This procedure will apply to all department members and will be used at all emergencies to which Franklin County Fire Departments respond. This procedure will apply to all communication system users.

Adopted: Fire County Fire Chiefs’ Association, 26 January 2010
Operational: 1 April 2010

User Agreement:

It is the responsibility of each agency to ensure system users follow established policies, procedures, rules and guidelines as promulgated by the **Franklin County Emergency Communication System (FCECS) Oversight Committee**, a committee established by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments.

It shall be the responsibility of each agency(s) to:

1. Report and respond to complaints concerning system usage.
2. Train department personnel on system use and protocols.
3. Ensure that radio equipment programming follows the guidelines established by the FECS Oversight Committee, the Western Massachusetts Homeland Security Council (WMHSC) and the Massachusetts Statewide Interoperable Executive Committee.

Channel Descriptions:

The **FECS Oversight Committee** has established a three tier communication system designed to reduce channel over-crowding and talk-over interference. These channels are as follows:

Simulcast – A large area radio coverage repeater system used primarily for the purpose of dispatching calls and requesting mutual aid and other resources

Regional Channels – Smaller area radio coverage repeater system to be used for incident communications between on-scene commanders, incoming apparatus and resources and/or Shelburne Control as required. Additionally, agencies may use these channels for non-emergency communication provided there is no interference with an on-going emergency incident.

Tactical Channels – A simplex radio system used for direct on-scene communications by all participants assigned to or covering an incident. These channels can not be monitored by Shelburne Control.

U-Tac Channels – A national system used for inter-agency communications on an emergency basis.

WMLEC Simulcast Channels – The Western Massachusetts Law Enforcement Council's Simulcast Channels are a wide area radio system encompassing most of Western Massachusetts which is primarily used for emergency communications between police agencies (WMLEC S-1). Fire departments may use WMLEC S-2 traveling outside their normal jurisdictional area in Western Massachusetts and as a mutual aid channel in Hampshire, Hampden, and Berkshire counties.

Channel Usage:

Simulcast

- To be used exclusively for vital emergency communications prior to Regional Channel assignment for the dispatching of calls, mutual aid coordination and other critical communications between the dispatch center and fire departments operating within the Tri-State Fire Mutual Aid System.

Regional Channels

- Once assigned by the dispatch center, to be used for emergency radio communications between the dispatch center and incident commanders.
- During an incident to be used, if required, to communicate between section chiefs or unit leaders when tactical channels will not accomplish acceptable communication quality.
- On non-interference basis, may be used for local agency non-emergency communications.

Tactical Channels

- To be used for on-scene incident tactical communications.

NOTE: Low power non-repeater transmissions providing limited communications coverage.

U-Tac Channels

- To be used for inter-agency communications at large scale disasters or emergencies.

WEMLEC Channels

- To be used within Western Massachusetts to communicate with other members of the WMLEC system

PROCEDURES:

Assignment of Channels

To insure the operational integrity of all simulcast, regional, and tactical frequencies licensed to the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) a primary dispatch center shall be designated by the Franklin Regional Communications Oversight Committee. This center shall be responsible for the day-to-day, and incident to incident coordination and management of radio frequency usage.

Radio Protocols

- Users will communicate in clear concise and professional manners at all times.
- **Plain language shall** be used to communicate information during incidents (i.e. 13-E5 becomes Greenfield Engine Five).
- Users shall establish contact with their dispatch center prior to continuing with their message.
 - For example: “Dispatch Greenfield Engine 5” – **wait** for “Dispatch’s on” – then proceed with “Greenfield Engine 5 Responding to
 - There shall be no blind communications (i.e. **blurting**). Blurting consists of sending a full message prior to allowing Shelburne Control to respond. “Shelburne Control Turners falls Engine 2, on scene we have two patients please dispatch a second ambulance.”

Dispatching Procedure:

- For **local jurisdiction dispatches**, the following procedures will apply (Exceptions: Greenfield, Turners Falls, and Orange Fire Departments)
 - The primary dispatch center shall dispatch fire departments on the UHF Simulcast 1 (S-1) 460.4 MHz.
 - Only the first two officers responding to a dispatch **within their jurisdiction** shall transmit on Simulcast S-1 to acknowledge receipt of the call.
 - All other individuals responding to a dispatch **shall not** transmit on Simulcast S-1 nor communicate with the dispatch center via radio or telephone unless one of the following situations exist:
 - Shelburne Control requests a response from a responding chief or department.
 - A department officer did not receive the voice portion of the dispatch.
 - The responder encounters another situation that significantly affects the dispatch process (i.e. road closings, accidents, construction).
 - The responder needs to report another emergency.
 - The responder arrives on scene and assumes the role of command.
- For **mutual aid dispatches**, the following procedures will apply:

- Responders **shall not** transmit on Simulcast S-1 nor communicate with the dispatch center via radio or telephone unless the dispatch center initiates the contact.
- Fire apparatus shall only communicate with Shelburne Control on Simulcast S-1 when they are actually responding. There shall be **no** communications stating '**on the air awaiting a crew**'.
- Shelburne Control shall initiate a request for '**any unit responding**' prior to the designated time for a re-tone of that department. Existing re-tone protocols will be followed from that point forward
- Apparatus shall remain on Simulcast S-1 until reporting to Shelburne Control that they are on-scene and switching to the designated channel for assignment.

On-Scene Procedure:

- Communication between the appropriate dispatch center and the on-scene Officer in Charge (Command) shall take place via the assigned regional channel
- If communication via the assigned regional channel should become compromised, or otherwise unworkable, **command** communication only shall temporarily revert to Simulcast S-1 until an alternative can be assigned.
- All on-scene, non-command, communications shall take place on designated tactical channel(s).
- Due to terrain and/or incident scope, the on-scene IC may utilize the assigned regional channel to communicate with group or unit leaders
- Except in an emergency situation, all communication with the appropriate dispatch center shall be to/from command on the designated regional channel.
- For large-scale mutual aid situations the current Tri-State Fire Mutual Aid System's radio channel assignment protocol will be followed post dispatch.

In-Service Procedure:

- Fire Apparatus released or returning from a call, shall only report, via Simulcast S-1 to Shelburne Control that they are "in service". An appropriate example of calling in service is as follows: "Shelburne Control Wendell Engine 1 (wait for a response from Shelburne Control) Wendell Engine 1 is clear from the mutual aid assignment in New Salem returning to Wendell."

- Multiple units from the same department in service at the same time shall generate only **one** call to Shelburne Control to indicate 'all units in service'.
- Local policy will determine when a department will declare equipment 'in service' (i.e leaving the scene, back in the district, in station). There is to be only **one** radio transmission covering this subject.

Resources:

Franklin County Emergency Communications Oversight Committee - Fire Service Standard Operating Procedures