

# Franklin County Emergency Communications System Commonwealth of Massachusetts Interoperable Radio System Fire Service – Standard Operating Procedures

Version 3.5.1

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## 1.0 Purpose

1.1 To establish a unified procedure to be followed by all fire agencies operating on the Franklin County talk groups and channels of the 800MHz Commonwealth of Massachusetts Interoperable Radio System (CoMIRS).

## 2.0 Scope

2.1 This standard operating procedure applies to all Franklin County fire agencies.

## 3.0 User Agreement

3.1 It shall be the responsibility of each agency to ensure system users follow established policies, procedures, rules and guidelines as promulgated by the Franklin County Fire Chiefs' Association (FCFC), which has worked with additional agencies responsible for components of the system and its operation, which are listed below.

3.1.1 Executive Offices of Technology Services and Security (EOTSS)

3.1.2 Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG)

**3.1.3** Franklin County Emergency Communication System Oversight Committee (FCECS)

**3.1.4** Massachusetts Statewide Interoperable Executive Committee (SIEC)

**3.1.5** Shelburne Control Regional Communications Center (Control)

**3.1.6** Tri-State Fire Mutual Aid, Inc. (TSFMA)

### **3.2 State, County and Municipal Agency Relationships**

**3.2.1** CoMIRS is owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and operated by EOTSS.

**3.2.2** FCECS is an oversight committee established by FRCOG.

**3.2.3** Shelburne Control is operated by the Massachusetts State Police.

**3.2.3** TSFMA is a non-profit corporation formed from emergency services organizations in the Tri-State area of western Massachusetts, southwestern New Hampshire and southern Vermont.

### **3.3 It shall further be the responsibility of each agency to:**

**3.3.1** Report radio system issues concerning system usage and respond to inquiries regarding submitted complaints. Refer to Section 7.0.

**3.3.2** Regularly train department personnel on system use and protocols.

**3.3.3** Ensure that radio equipment programming follows the guidelines established by the FCECS, EOTSS, and SIEC.

### **3.4 Franklin County Governance**

**3.4.1** The Franklin County CoMIRS Oversight Committee will act as the liaison between Franklin County agencies, the FRCOG, and EOTSS.

**3.4.2** The Committee is responsible for advocating improvements and modifications to the CoMIRS system.

**3.4.3** Individuals or agencies requesting changes which affect this document shall submit language for consideration to the president of the FCFC through their agency head.

**3.4.3.1** Approved changes will be disseminated to each fire department.

## **4.0 Commonwealth of Massachusetts Interoperable Radio System**

**4.1** FRCOG, FCECS and EOTSS has established the three-tier CoMIRS system, designed to reduce over-crowding and channel busy interference. These CoMIRS talk groups were created for use by Franklin County agencies and their mutual aid partners for normal operations. Users will notice distinct similarities and differences between the former 400MHz Simulcast system and should be prepared to understand operations on the CoMIRS system.

### **4.2 Franklin County Zones and Talk Groups (Refer to Appendix D):**

**4.2.1 FC ZONE A An** (Analog)

**4.2.2 FC ZONE A Dg** (Digital)

**4.2.3 FC ZONE B An**

- 4.2.4 FC ZONE B Dg
- 4.2.5 FC ZONE C An
- 4.2.6 FC ZONE C Dg

### **4.3 Franklin County Talk Groups:**

**4.3.1 Fire 1** – A trunked talk group used primarily for the purpose of dispatching calls and requesting and coordinating mutual aid and other resources. This talk group is comparable with and currently patched to UHF Simulcast-1.

**4.3.1.1** To be used exclusively for vital emergency communications prior to OPS talk group assignment such as the dispatching of calls, mutual aid coordination and other critical communications between the dispatch center and fire departments operating within the Franklin County area.

**4.3.2 Police 2** – A trunked talk group used primarily for the purpose of dispatching calls and requesting and coordinating mutual aid and other resources. This talk group is comparable with and currently patched to UHF Simulcast-2.

**4.3.3 Operational Talk Groups:** OPS-3, OPS-4, OPS-5, OPS-6, and OPS-7, a total of five trunked talk groups to be used for incident communications between on-scene commanders, incoming apparatus, resources, and/or Shelburne Control as required.

**4.3.3.1** Agencies may use OPS talk groups for non-emergency communication provided there is no interference with an on-going emergency incident.

**4.3.3.2** OPS talk groups are a shared resource between fire, EMS and police, and are comparable to UHF regional repeaters except they are not limited by geography.

**4.3.3.3** Operational talk groups will be assigned by Shelburne Control in numerical sequence upon dispatch. Refer to Section 5.5.3.

**4.3.3.3.1 Exception to 4.3.3.3:** The City of Greenfield Fire Department will utilize OPS-6 without prior approval from Shelburne Control.

**4.3.3.4** Once assigned by the dispatch center, to be used for emergency radio communications between the dispatch center and incident commanders.

**4.3.3.5** If all five talk groups are exhausted due to existing operations, agencies may be expected to share talk groups with another incident, or can utilize additional communications resources. Refer to Section 4.3.9.

**4.3.3.6** Due to operational needs, Shelburne Control may alter OPS talk group assignments as necessary.

**4.3.3.7** 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.

**4.3.3.8** On non-interference basis, may be used for local agency non-emergency communications. Request permission for OPS talk group use from Shelburne Control unless an emergency arises.

**4.3.4 Jurisdictional Operational Talk Groups:** Trunked operational talk groups dedicated to specific agencies.

**4.3.4.1** These talk groups are the primary operational resource used in these communities daily for fire and police department operations.

**4.3.4.2 GREENFIELD FD**  
**4.3.4.3 GREENFIELD PD**  
**4.3.4.4 TURNERS FLS FD**  
**4.3.4.5 MONTAGUE PD**  
**4.3.4.6 ORANGE FD**  
**4.3.4.7 ORANGE PD**

Greenfield Fire Department, Greenfield  
Greenfield Police Department, Greenfield  
Turners Falls Fire District, Montague  
Montague Police Department, Montague  
Orange Fire and EMS  
Orange Police Department, Orange

*4.3.5 Orange FD is currently patched to UHF New Salem Repeater. Turners FD is currently patched to UHF Shelburne 2 Repeater.*

*4.3.5.1 Other patches between the UHF 400 MHz system and CoMIRS can be requested as necessary.*

**4.3.6 Talk Around Channel (TAC)/Direct Channels** – TAC-8, TAC-9 and TAC-10, a total of three non-trunked (conventional), short distance radio channels used for direct on-scene communications by all participants assigned to or covering an incident. These channels are a shared resource between fire, EMS and police, are comparable to the UHF TAC channels, but cannot be monitored by Shelburne Control without additional communications resources.

**4.3.6.1** To be used for on-scene incident talk-around/tactical communications on a non-interference basis.

**4.3.6.2** TAC channels are for low power, non-trunked transmissions and provide limited communications coverage.

**4.3.6.3** Without additional communications resources these channels cannot be monitored by Shelburne Control.

**4.3.6.4** Extra communications resources can be requested through Shelburne Control (i.e. FC40, DFS ISU).

**4.3.6.5** Provide Notification to Shelburne Control when using a TAC channel for on-scene communications.

**4.3.7 Western Massachusetts Law Enforcement Council (WMLEC) Simulcast Talk Groups** – WMLEC Simulcast talk groups encompass most of Western Massachusetts and are primarily used for emergency communications between police agencies (WMLEC SIM-1 PD).

**4.3.7.1** Fire departments may use WMLEC SIM-2 FD traveling outside their normal jurisdictional area in Western Massachusetts and as a mutual aid channel in Franklin, Hampshire, Hampden, and Berkshire counties.

**4.3.7.2** WMLEC talk groups are located in the FD MUT AID An and FD MUT AID Dg Zones in the Mode Knob position 7.

**4.3.7.3** WMLEC talk groups are permanently patched to the corresponding UHF WMLEC channels.

**4.3.7.4** Refer to Section 5.9 for more mutual aid communications coordination details

**4.3.8 National 8CALL/8TAC Channels** – A national system used for inter-agency communications on an emergency basis.

**4.3.8.1** 8CALL and 8TAC channels are located in the 800 Interoperability Zone (800 INTEROP).

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

**4.3.8.3** Available for nationwide interoperability.

**4.3.8.4** 8TAC91D is to be used for air to ground communications in Franklin County. Refer to Section 5.3 “Air Resources”.

**4.3.8.5** Use of 8CALL and 8TAC channels must be coordinated with Control and MEMA. Refer to Appendix F.

**4.3.9 LPS TALK GROUPS** - Located in the LPS An and LPS Dg Zone.

**4.3.9.1** LPS7 and LPS9 are used as hailing talk groups and are regularly monitored by State Police Communications and MEMA.

**4.3.9.2** LPS7 should be used on a non-interference basis with Worcester County emergency service agencies.

**4.3.9.3** LPS8 and LPS10 are not regularly monitored and can be used as an additional operational talk groups without special permission or interference.

**4.3.9.4** Refer to Appendix F for more information regarding the use of LPS talk groups.

**4.3.10 EVENT TALK GROUPS** - Located in EVENT An and EVENT Dg Zones.

**4.3.10.1** To use these talk groups, permission must be granted from MEMA. They are typically used for large scale emergencies or planned events.

**4.3.10.2** EVENT TALK GROUPS can be requested from the [MSP Radio Support Center](#).

**4.3.10.3** Refer to Appendix F for more information regarding the use of EVENT talk groups

## **5.0 OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES:**

### **5.1 Talk Group Assignment**

**5.1.1** To ensure the operational integrity of the Franklin County Zones on the CoMIRS system, Shelburne Control Communications Center shall be responsible for the day to day, and incident to incident coordination and management, as well as assignment, of radio frequency usage.

### **5.2 Radio Protocols**

**5.2.1** These protocols are designed to standardize radio procedures and assist the dispatchers in performing their duties without interference.

**5.2.2** Users shall communicate in a clear, concise, and professional manner at all times.

**5.2.3 Plain language shall** be used to communicate information during incidents (i.e. 13-E5 is verbalized as Greenfield Engine Five).

**5.2.4** Fire Officers shall use the **X** designation with the community in plain language.

**5.2.4.1** Examples: *Chief: “Northfield X-1”, Assistant/Deputy Chief: “South Deerfield X-2”, Captain: “Wendell X-3”, Lieutenant: “New Salem X-4”, etc.*

**5.2.5** Other fire members may have the **Portable (P)** or other employee designation issued to them from their Chief, depending on each fire department’s policy.

**5.2.5.1** Example: “Leverett Portable-5” The plain English “Portable” should be used instead of “P”.

**5.2.6** EMTs and Paramedics, if allowed by department policy, may use the **MED** designation but **shall** be capable of aiding in transport if using the MED designation.

**5.2.7** Police use their **town number and cruiser or unit number** (i.e. Erving: 11-1, Gill: 12-2, Shelburne: 32-3, etc.) to be determined by the municipality's Police Chief and their policy.

**5.2.8** This system is built on a challenge-response communications method.

Transmissions shall first announce whom the user is calling and then whom the call is from. For example: *“Control, from Greenfield Engine 4.”— wait for Control’s response to proceed with the user’s traffic – “Control is on, Greenfield Engine 4.”— then transmit – “Greenfield Engine 4 is responding to Deerfield.”*

**5.2.9** Control will assign an OPS talk group upon dispatch and repeat on re-tones.

**5.2.10** During special circumstances or events, such as inspections, maintenance, parades, or training, apparatus do not need to sign on the air alerting Shelburne Control of their out-of-station status unless the following conditions exist:

**5.2.10.1** The agency is unable to facilitate an immediate response with other fire apparatus to a dispatched call for service.

**5.2.10.2** By going out of local jurisdiction, the agency will not have special response equipment immediately available, such as vehicle extrication or water rescue.

**5.2.10.3** The agency is placing another agency on an automatic-response status.

**5.2.11** There shall be no blind communications (i.e. **blurting**).

**5.2.11.1** Blurting example: *“Shelburne Control, from [Town] C-5, I am on scene with a two story residential structure...” with no pause to hear Control’s acknowledgment.*

**5.2.12** Under the rules of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), it is unlawful:

**5.2.12.1** to use profane, indecent, or obscene language.

**5.2.12.2** to willingly damage, or permit radio equipment to be damaged.

**5.2.12.3** to cause unlawful or malicious interference with other radio communications.

### **5.3 Air Resources**

**5.3.1** 8TAC91D is to be used for air ambulance (helicopter) to ground communications.

**5.3.1.1** When practical, users should notify the dispatch center of an aircraft’s safe landing and subsequent takeoff via their previously assigned talk group.

**5.3.1.2** 8TAC91D is a statewide air-to-ground interoperability channel. Refer to the *Commonwealth of Massachusetts Interoperability Field Operations Guide (MIFOG) - Version 2.2 March 2020*

### **5.4 Radio Discipline**

**5.4.1** Appropriate transmissions should call the target audience, wait for acknowledgment, and then deliver the message.

**5.4.2** Listen before speaking – Ensure the airwaves are clear before transmitting. Turning on a radio and immediately transmitting can interrupt a call and response that was already started prior.

**5.4.3** Take a breath – Before keying the mic take a deep breath. Avoid yelling and speed talking. Calm, clear, and professional messages will allow all others to understand and transmit only when needed.

**5.4.4** Think before talking – Think through what needs to be said before keying the microphone. Time is wasted, and confusion is created, when responders talk over the radio without knowing what they want to say.

**5.4.5** Not all fireground communication needs to go over the radio. If there is a need to use the radio, use it. Hold side conversations off the airwaves. If the situation safely permits it, face to face conversations are preferred.

**5.4.6** Be concise – Shorten messages to just the important details and be direct. Avoid long drawn out messages and rambling.

**5.4.7** Be professional - maintain composure, be clear, keep language formal and appropriate. Radio communication is almost purely verbal; the nonverbal clues we all unconsciously use in face-to-face communication simply aren't there. Radio transmissions are recorded and are public record; they also become evidence in court.

**5.4.8** Eliminate redundancies – Avoid unnecessary repeated transmissions. Command should clear all units in the least amount of radio calls appropriate.

## **5.5 Dispatching Procedure:**

**5.5.1** For **local jurisdiction dispatches**, the following procedures will apply:

**5.5.2** Shelburne Control shall dispatch fire departments on the FIRE 1 talk group and UHF Simulcast 1 channel. These are patched together at Shelburne Control.

**5.5.3** Shelburne Control dispatchers will state the agency being dispatched, the address, and nature of the emergency, followed by the OPS or agency talk group the responding agency, and any incoming mutual aid companies, will be utilizing on scene.

**5.5.3.1** Agencies will not self-assign an OPS talk group and will take the next available talk group in sequence as assigned by Shelburne Control.

**5.5.3.1.1 Exceptions to 5.5.3.1 and 4.3.3.3:** Agencies which typically communicate on a pre-designated agency talk group. Refer to Section 4.3.4.

**5.5.3.2** Responding agencies will not switch from Fire 1/UHF Simulcast-1 until they are on scene, at which point they will switch to the assigned OPS or agency talk group.

**5.5.3.3** It is acceptable and encouraged to gain situational awareness by utilizing a separate radio to monitor the assigned OPS or agency talk group while in transit to the incident scene.

**5.5.4** Only the first two officers responding to a dispatch **within their jurisdiction** shall transmit on FIRE 1 or UHF FC Simulcast 1 to acknowledge receipt of the call and sign on the air.

**5.5.4.1** Transmissions such as “responding”, “on the air”, or “on the air, responding” shall indicate the responder is enroute to the incident scene.

**5.5.4.2** All other individuals responding to a dispatch **shall not** transmit on FIRE 1 or UHF FC Simulcast 1 nor communicate with the dispatch center via radio or telephone unless one of the following situations exist:

**5.5.4.2.2** Shelburne Control requests a response from a responding unit or department.

**5.5.4.2.3** A department officer did not receive the voice portion of the dispatch.

**5.5.4.2.4** The responder encounters another situation that significantly affects the dispatch process (i.e. road closings, accidents, construction).

**5.5.4.2.5** The responder needs to report another emergency.

**5.5.4.2.6** The responder arrives first on scene and assumes the role of command, prior to arrival of superior officers.

**5.5.5 Exception to 5.5:** The City of Greenfield maintains and operates its own communications center for the Greenfield Fire Department and Greenfield Police Department, with independent standard operating procedures for use within the City of Greenfield. The Greenfield Fire Department will follow 5.5.6 on mutual aid assignments.

**5.5.6** For **mutual aid dispatches**, the following procedures will apply:

**5.5.6.1** Responders **shall not** transmit on FIRE 1 or UHF FC Simulcast 1 nor communicate with Control via radio or telephone unless Control initiates the contact.

**5.5.6.1.1 Exception to 5.5.6.1:** Chief officers can communicate with Control when going directly to the scene.

**5.5.6.2** Fire apparatus only shall communicate with Shelburne Control on FIRE 1 or UHF FC Simulcast 1 when they are **responding**.

**5.5.6.2.1** There shall be **no** communications stating “**on the air awaiting a crew**”.

**5.5.6.3** Shelburne Control shall initiate a request for “**any fire officer responding**” prior to the designated time for a re-tone of that department.

**5.5.6.4** Existing re-tone protocols will be followed from that point forward, with Control calling for “**any responding unit**”.

**5.5.6.5** Apparatus shall remain on FIRE 1 or UHF FC Simulcast 1 until reporting to Shelburne Control that they are on-scene and switching to the designated talk group/channel for assignment.

## **5.6 On-Scene Procedure:**

**5.6.1** Communication between the appropriate dispatch center and on-scene Incident Command shall take place via the assigned Operations talk group/regional channel.

**5.6.2** If communication via the assigned Operations talk group/regional channel should become compromised, or otherwise unworkable, **command** communication only shall temporarily revert to Fire 1/UHF FC Simulcast 1 until an alternative can be assigned.

**5.6.3** All on-scene, non-command, communications shall take place on designated tactical channel(s) or talk groups.

**5.6.4** Due to terrain and/or incident scope, the on-scene Incident Commander or designee may utilize the assigned Operations talk group/regional channel or an alternate Operations talk group/regional channel, as assigned by Control, to communicate with group or unit leaders.

**5.6.5** Except in an emergency situation, all communication with the Incident Commander or designee and the appropriate dispatch center shall be on the designated Operations talk group/regional channel.

## **5.7 In-Service Procedure:**

**5.7.1** Within their local jurisdiction(s), fire agencies released or returning from a call shall generate only **one** call to Shelburne Control, via Fire 1/UHF FC Simulcast 1, that **all units** are “*returning in service*” or “*returning out of service*”.



**5.7.1.1** If a particular fire apparatus is out of service, the incident commander, their designee, or operator of the apparatus is authorized to declare what apparatus is out of service.

**5.7.1.2** Statements such as the following: “*Command terminated, all units are clear*”, or “*units are returning*” are acceptable and will be assumed to indicate all apparatus are in service.

**5.7.2** Out of local jurisdiction(s), apparatus being cleared from mutual aid assignments are authorized to declare their cleared status so long as the incident commander, or their designee, has not already done so.

**5.7.2.1** During mutual aid assignments, incident commanders, or their designee, can utilize this type of phrasing: “*Control, from Erving Command, ” wait for Control’s response, “I am releasing Leverett, Gill, and Northfield.*” All units are marked clear by Control and can return to their stations without additional radio calls.

**5.7.3** Within local jurisdiction(s), local policy determines when a department will declare equipment “in service”, such as whether they are leaving the scene, back in their primary jurisdiction, or in the station.

## **5.8 Emergency Procedure:**

**5.8.1** Refer to Appendix A, *FCECS/CoMIRS Training Bulletin 2021-01*.

## **5.9 Communications Coordination with agencies outside Franklin County:**

**5.9.1** Refer to Appendix B, *FCECS/CoMIRS Transition Plan*.

## **6.0 TRAINING:**

### **6.1 Motorola Training Guide**

**6.1.1** Refer to Appendix C, *FCECS APX4000 and APX6000 Guide*.

### **6.2 FCFC Standard Operating Guide 001**

**6.2.1** Refer to Appendix E, *FCFC Standard Operating Guide 001*.

### **6.3 Massachusetts Radio Interoperability Guide**

**6.3.1** Refer to Appendix F, *Massachusetts Radio Interoperability Guide*.

## **7.0 SYSTEM TROUBLE REPORTING**

**7.1** Trouble Ticket for reporting radio system issues:

**7.1.1** <https://frcog.org/franklin-county-emergency-communications-system/>

## **8.0 COMPLETE LIST OF FRANKLIN COUNTY ZONES AND TALK GROUPS**

**8.1** Refer to Appendix D, *Franklin County Zones and Talk Groups*.

## **9.0 REVISIONS**

9.1 10/12/2021 – Joseph Cuneo and Cameron Dunbar

9.2 10/27/2021 – Joseph Cuneo (revisions provided by the FCFC 10/26/2021 meeting)

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Promulgated by the FCFC Radio Protocol Subcommittee*

**Adopted by the Franklin County Fire Chiefs Association, \_\_\_\_\_, 2021  
Operational in Franklin County as of January 1, 2022.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
President, Franklin County Fire Chiefs Assn.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date