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Derby Fire Department
Standard Operating Procedure Number 03
Dispatch and Radio Communications

1. Purpose

- 1.1. Proper radio communication is necessary to insure accurate dispatch and effective coordination of any emergency scene to which the Derby Fire Department has been called. A well-designed and operated radio system is also essential to insure the safety of all personnel operating at the scene of a fire or any other emergency.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. The FCC licenses the Derby Fire Department to broadcast over the frequencies of 453.050 MHz, 33.44 MHz, and 33.70 MHz. Dispatch and routine communications will be broadcast over UHF frequency - 453.050 MHz. Fireground Channel 3 communications will be broadcast over UHF frequency – 453.050 MHz. Fireground Channel 4 communications will be broadcast over UHF frequency – 453.050 MHz.

3. Dispatch and General Communications

- 3.1. The Derby Fire Department will be dispatched by Central Medical Emergency Dispatch (CMED) New Haven who will be referred to as “Derby Fire Comm”. Dispatch will be in accordance with the CMED/Derby Fire Department Dispatch Protocol (see Appendix) and alarm (apparatus) assignments as entered into the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. Under no circumstances is any unit to answer an alarm unless officially dispatched by Derby Fire Comm. Only apparatus that has been dispatched and the Chief Officers (FD1, FD2, FD3 and FD4) will sign on the air announcing their response.
- 3.2. Fire department radios will be used only for official department business. All radio communications should be calm, clear and concise. All members will use common language and terminology when making a transmission, and will insure that the air is clear of other radio traffic before keying the microphone.

3.3. Derby Fire Comm needs only for the apparatus to announce when they are responding, when they have arrived on scene, and when they have returned to service (indicating availability to handle another call). Example of the standard message format is as follows:

- (FDID#) responding, i.e. “Engine 11 responding”
- (FDID#) arrived on scene, i.e. “Engine 13 on scene”
- (FDID#) in service, i.e. “Truck 15 in service”

4. Mobile Repeaters and Talk-Around

- 4.1. The first arriving unit equipped with a mobile repeater will turn on the repeater and announce that it is in service, i.e. “Rescue 18 to Derby Fire Comm, arrived on scene, Rescue 18’s repeater is active”. Once a mobile repeater is active, additional incoming units also equipped with repeaters are **not** to activate their repeater unless specifically instructed by IC.
- 4.2. If a mobile repeater is not on scene, and portable UHF radios are not able to hit the fixed repeater(s), then it may be necessary to switch to talk around to enable communication with other units and the IC on scene.
- 4.3. Special note – when using talk around on UHF portables, communication will not be simulcast over low band (33.44 MHz). Therefore, communication between UHF and low band portables will not be possible.
- 4.4. Because of the difficulty in changing channels during firefighting operations, and the possibility of making an error, it is not advisable to change settings unless absolutely necessary. If the portable is working fine on the original channel, there is no need to change it.

5. Size-Up

5.1. The first arriving officer (or apparatus driver in the absence of an officer who thus assumes Incident Command) will be responsible for radioing an initial size-up. This will include the following information:

- Identification of unit calling (and in command)
- Verification of location (or new address if original dispatch was in error)
- Construction and approximate size of building
- Occupancy and/or significant life safety hazards
- Conditions found on arrival (ex. light smoke showing from second floor)
- Exposures (if any)
- Immediate actions being taken
- Any imminent hazards or special directions for incoming units

5.2. The initial size up should be made by the first arriving IC only. It is disruptive for additional incoming units to continuously repeat the same information. The exception to this rule would be on a large structure when apparatus responding from a different direction identifies a condition that may not have been observed by the first arriving unit.

5.3. Incident Commanders must take the time necessary to conduct a proper size-up of the situation so that the information relayed to dispatch is accurate, organized and meaningful.

6. Upgrading Response

6.1. The IC can upgrade an alarm at any time when conditions warrant (i.e. still alarm to full box alarm assignment) but only after completing and communicating a proper size-up. Under most circumstances, a second (or additional) alarm should be transmitted only after the initial alarm companies have been properly positioned and deployed.

7. Radio Updates

7.1. It is good practice for the IC to periodically update conditions so that dispatch can anticipate additional activity and so that all crews on the fire ground have a more complete, overall “picture” of the operation.

8. Downgrading Response

8.1. When a Chief Officer has signed on the air, all status reports will be relayed to that officer (highest ranking), who will make DECISIONS as to down grading that particular response based on the information available and/or suggestion from on-scene personnel. This decision can include the downgrading or complete termination of the response.

8.2. Until such a decision is made by the Chief Officer, all units will continue to respond to the call with a priority commensurate with the conditions reported during the initial size up or the most recent radio update.

Any member assuming the role of Incident Commander must thoroughly investigate the incident before returning any unit to service.

8.3. On calls to which both the Derby Fire Department and Storm Ambulance Corps has been dispatched, no fire department member or IC will downgrade or cancel the EMS response. Only a certified, on-scene member (EMT or greater) of the Storm Ambulance Corps. will be authorized to downgrade or cancel EMS response, and then only after a thorough evaluation of all potential patients or victims.

9. Emergency Communications

9.1. On the fireground, every crew should be supervised by a company officer equipped with a two-way portable radio. In the absence of a line officer, the senior member of the crew will be in charge and must secure a portable radio from the apparatus. At a minimum, every crew should have at least one fully functional portable radio with them at all times.

9.2. To prevent important communications from being missed or misinterpreted, the following emergency terms will be used exclusively for their intended purpose:

9.2.1. **Mayday**

The term “Mayday” will be used only to report a firefighter(s) in serious trouble. This would include a firefighter that is trapped, lost, seriously injured, or otherwise in need of immediate rescue. Any firefighter in need of assistance (or others calling on their behalf) shall declare a Mayday, clearly identify their unit number, and then accurately report the location, nature and scope of the emergency situation. They should also simultaneously activate the emergency button on their TPASS unit if it is not already sounding.

9.2.2. Once a Mayday is declared, all other radio traffic will cease. Units will clear the air of all radio traffic so that the IC can effectively communicate with both the firefighter(s) in distress and the Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) without interference. The IC will initiate all communications, and all other fire crews will not use the radio unless there is an equally emergent communication or when directly called by the IC.

9.2.3. **Emergency Traffic**

The term “Emergency Traffic” will be used to indicate that an important, high priority communication will be made. Only a Mayday broadcast will supercede this communication in importance. Upon hearing the term “Emergency Traffic”, all routine radio communication will cease and radio silence will be observed until the entire “Emergency Traffic” message has been transmitted and the purpose of that message has effectively reached the intended recipients.

10. Two-way Radio Equipment

10.1. Any member of the Derby Fire Department or other city agency wishing to use a mobile or portable radio that was not provided by the department, must first receive written permission from the Fire Commissioner or Chief of the department. All radios must be capable of being programmed with an identification number (IDN). Upon approval, the department will issue a unique IDN that must be programmed into the radio before it is used. The IDN will serve to recognize the source of the radio transmission on alpha displays at Derby Fire Comm, on DFD apparatus, and on the radios of the Chief officers.

10.2. The member will also receive a Derby Fire Department radio number that must be used during any and all transmissions. Any member not adhering to this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, which may include revocation of the privilege to use Derby Fire Department frequencies on their personal radio.