

Radio Communications

Communication often determines the success or failure of fire service operations. We rely on effective communication in our everyday life, daily station operations, and most importantly during emergency operations. There are a lot of ways that we communicate information to each other during an emergency incident but one of the most common ways is through the use of a radio.

There are several things that we can do to maximize the effectiveness of communicating to each other through the use of our radio equipment. All too often we misuse this tool and the results create confusion and frustration. The following guidelines should be considered and implemented into your daily use.

The Dispatch

After receiving a call, our dispatch center will dispatch units and provide information that they have obtained through the caller. When your pager goes off, listen! The initial dispatch will include the type of incident, address, and sometimes additional call information. If you listen to the initial dispatch carefully, it may answer some of the questions that you have as you start to size-up the call you're going to.

It is also important that someone acknowledges the receipt of the alarm by placing them self enroute to the station. Remember that not everyone needs to transmit that they are responding. Try to listen to all radio traffic after the alarm so you know who is coming and any additional dispatch information that dispatch may provide. If there are questions, corrections, or additional request that need to take place make

sure that you address them. Try not to generate unnecessary radio traffic.

Radio Basics

The use of your radio seems simple, and it is, but there are a few things you can do to improve radio use. Now that our dispatch frequency is a repeated system, traffic from the entire county can be heard in most locations. Before you transmit, make sure that the air is clear. Try to anticipate when other units may be transmitting. For example, if E361 transmits "E361 to dispatch" wait for dispatch to respond before saying "T363 to dispatch."

Keep your transmissions short. Cut out extra words that we may use in everyday conversation and just say what you need. "Yes sirs, show me's, can you's" etc. are polite but not needed. Simply say, "E321 dispatch, enroute crew of four." Think about what you want to say before you transmit and practice radio transmission during training to perfect your radio skill.

The way we talk on the radio also plays a huge role in both the ability to hear messages and the environment that you create on the incident scene. We all love what we do, that is why we do it and when we get to do what we love it is exciting. To be effective on the fire ground we have to control our excitement and the same goes for our radio transmissions. A great analogy of our job sums this up by saying, "garbage men don't get excited when they pull up to a house and see garbage, they expect garbage, it's their job." The same goes for us, we know we are going to a fire, don't let your excitement override your brain. Clear, calm radio transmissions are easier to understand and it sets the tone for everyone else that is excited to do their job.

Operations

As you arrive on the scene of an incident, there are a few important steps that you take and transmit on the radio. When you are the first to arrive, you have the responsibility to report what you have and you also become the eyes on scene that can direct everyone else. We accomplish this by transmitting a scene size-up and implementing the incident command system.

There are several acronyms and recommendations for the content of a scene size-up. Your size-up should be as thorough as the incident requires. At the very least your size-up should include what you have and what are you going to do about it. Your size-up should paint a picture for all other incoming units. Getting on scene and simply saying that you have a fire and you're putting it out does not paint a very detailed picture.

A more detailed size-up may sound more like; *"on-scene of a two story residential structure with fire visible on the second floor B side, E341 is establishing a tanker water supply and will be on attack, E341 has NE 1000 command."* This size-up provides a little more detail for other units on the way to you, and for any other decisions that need to be made through-out the district. To perfect your size-up transmission it takes practice and knowledge of what you're looking at. Is it residential or commercial, is it the A side or the B side, and is it ordinary construction or wood frame or something else?

After completing our size-up and establishing ICS, we must organize the set-up of our scene. This can involve several different things and may require several radio transmissions. To assist in smooth communications consider a few things. Fire frequency is a repeated frequency. With that in mind we should be able to communicate truck to truck without having to have dispatch relay information. Instead of *Command to dispatch, advise B315 to slow their response*, cut out the middle and say *Command to B315...go ahead for B315...slow your response and continue*. Most of

the time if dispatch can hear you on fire frequency the other trucks can hear you too.

Another consideration is moving your operations to a fire ground frequency quickly. Making the switch to a fire ground frequency early can reduce covered traffic from a saturated dispatch frequency. It also allows incoming units to make the switch when they arrive so they don't have to mess with their radios after they arrive on scene or are in the middle of an operation. *B395 dispatch, on scene of a four acre natural cover fire, B395 will be on attack and have SW 600 command, have all incoming units contact command on fire ground 1 on arrival*. This example gets your size-up, command, and switch to ground taken care of in one step. Keep in mind though that ground frequencies are not repeated so contacting other apparatus that are still a good distance away may be difficult and may require the use of the dispatch frequency.

Summary

Radio communications have enhanced the way that we operate on the fire ground. We are able to communicate better than we ever have which has created a lot of bad habits. Training to use our radio tools properly can improve our overall operation by communicating information better.

We must prepare to do our jobs in a calm and collected fashion. Remember that the way you conduct business over the radio can set the tone for the entire operation. Practice will help you achieve this, so use radios during your training evolutions. Set-up command and run your training drills like a fire scene. This is how you will improve your personal skills and identify areas that need improved upon.

The radio is a valuable tool and this training minute has only touched on a small portion of its uses. Like every tool, its operation is as only as good as it's operator. Slow down, train often, and always find ways to improve yourself.