

SUBJECT: SURGE COMMUNICATIONS

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedure is to ensure the prompt reporting and rapid exchange of accurate information during a Mass Casualty Incident (MCI), emergency exercise, and/or backfill operations via the Very High Frequency (VHF) radio system used by the Philadelphia Fire Department (PFD) and non-municipal ambulances operating as surge ambulances. In particular, these procedures specify the following requirements for the VHF radio system:

1. Who must use it.
2. How it must and must not be used.
3. When it must and must not be used.
4. Remedies for its misuse.

These operations shall be in accordance with the Statement of Participation Between Non-Municipal Ambulance Services and the City of Philadelphia Fire Department; Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH) Rules and Regulations 1005.10-Licensure and General Operating Standards; Pennsylvania Bulletin, Vol. 33, No. 39, Pg. 4852-Notices: Required Ground and Air Ambulance Equipment and Supplies; City of Philadelphia Mass Casualty Plan; and Federal Communications Commission regulations. Unofficial or unauthorized use of the radio system, use of profanity, or tampering with the radio system shall result in disciplinary action including but not limited to exclusion from the surge program and/or loss of licensure.

2. DEFINITIONS

2.1 ATTENDANTS

Individuals certified by the PA DOH, Bureau of Emergency Medical Services as Emergency Medical Technicians, Paramedics, Pre-Hospital Registered Nurses, Health Professional Physicians (HP), or First Responders functioning on a surge ambulance.

2.2 CLASSIFICATION OF RADIO MESSAGES

2.2.1 Routine message - Normal transmissions of a non-emergency nature.

2.2.2 Priority message- A transmission to get precedence over routine messages.(Example: a significant change in the condition of the patient being transported, which requires redirecting to a different hospital.)

2.2.3 Urgent message- A critical transmission that needs to interrupt and clear other radio traffic when the situation warrants assistance without delay. (Example: a life-threatening situation or injury has occurred, which would directly affect responders and/or bystanders.)

Note: Terms priority and urgent shall precede the transmission of these types of messages.

2.3 FIRE COMMUNICATIONS CENTER (FCC)

The FCC is the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) for the City of Philadelphia.

2.4 MASS CASUALTY INCIDENT (MCI)

An incident resulting from man-made or natural causes resulting in injuries or illness that may exceed the EMS and hospital capabilities of a locality, jurisdiction, or region.

2.5 MISCELLANEOUS COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT

Additional means of communications may be supplied and controlled by the Non-municipal Ambulance Service owning the ambulance. These include cellular phones and pagers. Surge ambulance cellular telephone numbers will be provided to the PFD as part of the credentialing process.

2.6 MOBILE RADIOS

Radio units permanently mounted in vehicles. All attendants will familiarize themselves with the operating instructions for their radios.

2.7 PFD COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM AND COMPONENTS

2.7.1 Station Computer Assisted Dispatch (CAD) System - monitor, printer, and keyboard directly connected to PFD FCC dispatch center

2.7.2 Miscellaneous Portable Communications Devices-Pagers and Cellular Phones

2.8 NON-MUNICIPAL AMBULANCE SERVICE

A Philadelphia-based non-municipal ambulance company that, upon the request of the PFD, provides a surge ambulance to an MCI, emergency exercise, or backfill operation.

2.9 RADIO SYSTEM

The radio system includes communications equipment designed to function within a prescribed geographical area (City of Philadelphia).

2.10.1 RADIO IDENTIFICATION CODES (RIC)

Radio Identification Codes are vehicle specific radio call signs, assigned by the FCC to be utilized as the vehicle identifier for all radio communications.

2.11 SURGE AMBULANCE

An appropriately staffed ALS or BLS, PA DOH, BEMS licensed ambulance registered in the County of Philadelphia, that has been credentialed and dispatched to an incident by the PFD.

2.12 SURGE AMBULANCE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM AND COMPONENTS

2.13.1 P 25 compliant VHF Mobile Radio - Permanently mounted radios in vehicles.

2.13.2 Miscellaneous Portable Communications Devices - Pagers and Cellular Phones.

2.14 TERMINOLOGY

2.14.1 OFFICER

The radio transmission term "Officer" will only be used by the Officer/Acting Officer-in-charge of a PFD fire suppression company to indicate the identity of the person transmitting the message. Example: "Engine 16 Officer", "Ladder 4 Officer", etc. **This does not apply to ambulances, or to units with a driver only.**

2.14.2 PHONETIC ALPHABET

The PHONETIC ALPHABET is to be used for the clarification of spelling:

A=Alpha	H=Hotel	O=Oscar	V=Victor
B=Bravo	I=India	P=Papa	W=Whiskey
C=Charlie	J=Juliet	Q=Quebec	X=X-Ray
D=Delta	K=Kilo	R=Romeo	Y=Yankee
E=Echo	L=Lima	S=Sierra	Z=Zulu
F=Foxtrot	M=Mike	T=Tango	
G=Golf	N=November	U=Unif	

2.14.3 RADIO

The term "Radio" is the call sign for the FCC. Unless otherwise directed all routine, priority, and urgent communications shall be made to "Radio".

2.14.5 RESPONSE SPEEDS

Emergency Speed - Response speed utilizing visual and audible warning devices (e.g. lights and sirens) and complying with all related Pennsylvania vehicle codes and Philadelphia traffic ordinances.

Proceed In and Standby - Proceed at emergency speed to assigned dispatch location and have all attendants remain with the surge ambulance and await further orders.

Reduced Speed - All warning devices will be turned off. Proceed to assignment. Obey all traffic rules and regulations, and have all attendants remain with the surge ambulance and await further orders.

Standby – Safely pull to the side of the road and stop. Remain with the surge ambulance and await further orders via radio.

Note: Under "Proceed In and Standby," "Reduce Speed" and "Standby" responses, attendants are to be aware that unless the surge ambulance goes into service, they are still considered available for dispatch to another location. The FCC can utilize a surge ambulance for dispatches in the area of the initial assignment.

- 2.15 WARNING DEVICES** - Warning lights, siren, and air horn (where available, but used with discretion) which enable surge ambulances to gain the attention of the drivers of other vehicles, and pedestrians, and respond safely to dispatch locations.

3. RESPONSIBILITY

It will be the responsibility of each ambulance attendant and non-municipal ambulance service to exercise the appropriate control in the implementation of this procedure.

4. PROCEDURE

4.1 OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS - GENERAL

- 4.1.1** FCC dispatchers will be responsible for maintaining discipline on the air, clearing radio traffic as soon as possible and determining radio priority. Message priority, which is determined by dispatchers, will be final and their messages shall receive prompt compliance.
- 4.1.2** Radio transmissions will be brief and concise, and unrequested repetition not called for by this procedure will be avoided. Lengthy messages are to be transmitted via telephone.
- 4.1.3** Personal greetings and pleasantries will be avoided in the interest of brevity. Messages will be specific, comprehensive and distinctly spoken. Attendants will speak at moderate speed using normal conversational tone.
- 4.1.4** Surge ambulances attempting to reach "Radio" will simply announce their call sign, e.g. "ABC ambulance 1". It is not necessary to say "ABC ambulance 1 to Radio." FCC dispatchers will acknowledge by replying, "Proceed ABC ambulance 1." When Radio is attempting to reach a surge ambulance they will only say the unit's call sign, e.g. "ABC ambulance 1". The surge ambulance will acknowledge Radio by stating their call sign. Surge ambulances that need to reach another unit other than Radio must announce to

whom their message is directed, e.g. “ABC ambulance 1 to Ground/Air Ambulance Coordinator”.

- 4.1.5** Attendant must receive acknowledgment before proceeding with transmission. If the first call is not acknowledged within ten (10) seconds, the call will be repeated. No more than three (3) such calls will be made. If a third call is not acknowledged, the radio will be presumed to be inoperative and the message will be transmitted from another on-scene unit or by telephone.
- 4.1.6.** Telephone reports may be used in lieu of the radio where more expedient. Attendants who have to use a telephone are to use the following telephone number: (215) 686-1340,41 (FCC Supervisor).
- 4.1.7** FCC dispatchers will transmit the exact address and location of incident and/or staging location and any other pertinent information. Surge ambulances will immediately verify all dispatches given them by the FCC. If units do not verify dispatches within one minute, the dispatcher will attempt to contact them to ascertain receipt of transmission. If the response of the surge ambulance will be delayed, the FCC will make the determination whether that unit should be replaced. After the incident has been declared under control, any delayed responses by surge ambulances will be reported to the Philadelphia Regional EMS Office.
- 4.1.8** Surge ambulances shall inform Radio of arrival at and departure from the scene of an emergency. When a surge ambulance arrives on location or at a hospital they will report their status to Radio.
- 4.1.9** While in service with the PFD, surge ambulances will maintain communications at all times.
- 4.1.10** Attendants will pay close attention to radio transmissions while responding to an incident, alert for further orders relative to that incident.
- 4.1.11** Surge ambulances delayed while responding for any reason will immediately notify Radio.
- 4.1.12** In those cases where an assignment has been completed and the surge ambulance is released, attendants will notify Radio of their status. At all times, until release is confirmed, one attendant from the surge ambulance will remain with the radio in order to maintain communications.
- 4.1.13** VHF radios are only permitted to be used when the vehicle is being operated as a surge ambulance. VHF radios will not be used to communicate with Radio unless a request for assistance has been made by the PFD. Unauthorized usage is a violation of the Statement of Participation, and will result in the Non-municipal Ambulance Service being responsible for the ambulance being eliminated from the program and/or action by the PA DOH.

4.2 DISPATCH / RECALL PROCEDURES

4.2.1 Surge ambulances calling Radio with a message will be acknowledged using the following format:

ABC ambulance 1: "ABC ambulance 1 to Radio"
Dispatcher: "Proceed ABC ambulance 1"
ABC ambulance 1: "ABC ambulance 1 arriving at Jefferson Hospital".
Dispatcher: "OK ABC ambulance 1"

Note: By using this procedure the FCC controls radio traffic, thereby assuring that ABC ambulance 1 has the dispatcher's attention and that their message was received.

4.2.2 Recall Procedures:

The dispatcher will announce: "Attention all surge ambulances responding to [announce location of incident] with the exception of [announce units are not to be recalled] recall, followed by in-service times. [Repeat recall message.]" e.g. "Attention all surge ambulances responding to 512 N. 3rd Street with the exception of ABC ambulance 1 and ABC ambulance 2 recall. (repeat same). Times are 1510 to 1620."

4.3 MAINTENANCE AND CARE OF COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT

4.3.1 The Non-municipal Ambulance Service is solely responsible for appropriately maintaining their VHF radio equipment.

- a. Anytime a prehospital provider recognizes that a radio failure has occurred to any part of their VHF communications system, even a momentary failure, it will be reported to the Non-municipal Ambulance Service, who will report it to the Philadelphia Regional EMS Office, and the FCC. The FCC and the Philadelphia Regional EMS Office will be regularly updated on the status of repairs. When the Non-municipal Ambulance Service has the communications problem resolved, the Non-municipal Ambulance Service will notify the FCC and the Regional EMS office immediately.
- b. Attendants will report radio equipment defects which do not prevent communication between the PFD and non-municipal ambulances.

4.3.2 The Non-municipal Ambulance Service is responsible for participating in regularly scheduled VHF radio testing. The schedule for this testing will be posted on the Philadelphia Regional EMS Office website at: <http://www.phila.gov/RegionalEMS/>

4.3.3 If the VHF radio is stolen, the Non-municipal Ambulance Service will notify the FCC, Philadelphia Regional EMS Office, and the Philadelphia Police Department.

4.4 RIC'S AND DESIGNATIONS

- 4.4.1** FCC will develop and assign Radio Identification Codes (RIC) to all Philadelphia ambulances. RICs will be followed by the letter “B” if the ambulance is a BLS unit.
- 4.4.2** FCC dispatcher, surge ambulance attendants, and PFD members will use assigned RIC in all communications.
- 4.4.3** If it becomes necessary for the FCC to instruct a surge ambulance to backfill a PFD ambulance and assume the identifying number of the PFD ambulance being backfilled, the following procedure will be used:
- a. The surge ambulance assigned to backfill will use their identifying number in conjunction with the identifying number of the PFD ambulance being backfilled separated by a dash. e.g.: ABC ambulance 1 assigned to cover up at Medic 9’s station: Company RIC will become “ABC ambulance 1 dash 9”.
 - b. If the backfill surge ambulance is dispatched to the original initiating incident, which caused them to be activated, the PFD ambulance company number is dropped from the identifying number and the company responds with its own identifying number.

5. GENERAL INFORMATION

- 5.1** No radio transmission will be made within 500 feet of a blasting operation or bomb threat area until cleared by police. Cellular telephones also will not be used within this area.
- 5.2** Radios will not be used to transmit or request the name or company of PFD member(s), non-municipal ambulance attendants, or members any other entity operating on the incident. In the event of an injury or death, the FCC shall be contacted by phone for the exchange of confidential information.
- 5.3** Whenever attendants or FCC personnel detect a weak radio signal from a unit in the field, or an obvious radio problem, they will check for the cause, take appropriate action, and notify the Non-municipal Ambulance Service.
- 5.4** Radios will not be used to transmit patient names, addresses, or any individual specific patient identifiers which would violate current HIPPA regulations. Confidential patient information will only be transmitted by telephone.



RADIO CALL NUMBERS

1. FIRE DEPARTMENT RADIO CALL NUMBERS

CAR 1 Fire Commissioner
CAR 2 Deputy Commissioner, Operations
CAR 3 Deputy Commissioner, Technical Services
CAR 5 Special Investigations Officer
CAR 6 Chief of Aviation/Marine Operations
CAR 7 Employee Relations Officer
CAR 8 Safety Officer
TS 1 Chief of Technical Support Unit
TS 2 Apparatus Officer
TS 3 Equipment Officer
TS 4 Research and Planning
TS 5 Water Operations Officer
ER 1 Employee Assistance Unit
ES 1 Medical Director
ES 2 Administrative Chief EMS
ES 3 Operations Chief EMS
ES 4 Paramedic Field Officer South
ES 5 Paramedic Field Officer North
ES 6 Regional Director EMS
ES 7 EMS Training Chief
ES 8 Paramedic Field Officer System Status Management
ES 9 Administrative Captain EMS
ES 10 Mass Casualty Response Vehicle
ES 11 Mass Casualty Response Vehicle
ES12 Apparatus/Equipment Officer EMS
FC 1 Chief Dispatcher
FC 2 Assistant Chief Dispatcher
FC 3 Fire Survey Staff Use
FCOM 1 Mobile Communications Unit
FCOM 2 Mobile Communications Unit
HM 1 Hazardous Material Unit
HU 1 Chief Hazardous Material Administrative Unit
HU 2 Captain Hazardous Material Administrative Unit
LW 1 Light Wagon
SA 1 2nd Alarmers Unit
SA 2 2nd Alarmers Unit

APPENDIX "A"

2. OUTSIDE AGENCIES WITH FIRE DEPARTMENT CALL LETTERS.

EM 2 Emergency Management Analyst
CP 1 Mobile Command Post Managing Directors Office
CP 2 Mobile Command Post Managing Directors Office
M 1 Mayor
M 4 Deputy Managing Director of Emergency Management
R 8 Mobile Communications Unit Police Dept.
TAC AIR 1 Helicopter Unit Police Dept.
TAC AIR 2 Helicopter Unit Police Dept.

3. NON-MUNICIPAL CALL SIGNS



PHILADELPHIA REGIONAL EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES