



# PRINCE GEORGE FIRE AND EMS

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**Section Number: 2.1**

**Date: November 1, 2015**

**Title: Emergency Communications  
Radio Procedures**

**Authorized By:**

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## Scope and Purpose:

Prince George Fire, EMS, and Emergency Management provides a broad range of emergency services to its citizens. Those services include fire prevention, suppression, investigations, technical rescue, hazardous materials handling, emergency medical services, extrication, emergency management, and community training.

This policy provides a uniform procedure for dispatching and general radio use and applies to all fire and EMS personnel utilizing the County's emergency communications equipment. All personnel will make themselves familiar with all radio equipment and procedures.

## Terminology/Definitions:

Prince George County Emergency Services operate under the federally mandated *National Incident Management System (NIMS)* concept utilizing the Incident Command System (ICS). The use of common language is therefore mandated. The use of common language will assure everyone understands what is expected and/or is occurring on scene. Since ten-codes are not universally consistent across the County or jurisdictional boundaries, ten-codes shall not be used.

**Affirmative or OK** – to acknowledge radio traffic with a positive response

**Approved** – person who has received the proper training and is qualified to perform work in a certain capacity

**Arrival Report** – brief description of existing conditions upon arrival on scene

**Available** – when a unit is clear and ready for service

**Clear** – used when units clear from the incident

**Code 99** – used for any medical full arrest or cardiac arrest

**Code Grey** – shall be used when the patient is pronounced dead on the scene

**Command** – synonymous with incident commander (IC), person in charge at incident scene

**Contact Call** – method of calling the receiving party and waiting for an acknowledgement to proceed with radio traffic

**Disregard** – when units are not on scene and are no longer needed

**District** – pre-designated response areas

**ECC** – Emergency Communications Center

**EOC** – Emergency Operations Center

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**Emergency** – incidents that have, or potentially have, an impact on life safety; as a response mode term this means respond using emergency lights and audible warning devices

**Enroute** – see “Responding”; terms are interchangeable

**Helispot** – (also referred to as landing zone) a safe location at or near an incident for temporary landing and take-off of helicopters as well as on and/or offloading of victims, personnel, equipment, etc.

**In Quarters** – used when units arrive back at their assigned stations

**In Service** – available for response

**Knock Out Tones** – radio paging tones necessary to alert radio voice pagers, etc. for alerting fire, EMS, and other potential responders

**Mayday** – shall only be used when a firefighter or crewmember is in immediate danger of loss of life or serious injury (*for MAYDAY procedures, see “Regional MAYDAY Policy and Procedure”*)

**Negative** – to acknowledge radio traffic with a “no” response

**Non-Emergency** – incidents that do not have life safety concerns; as a response mode term this means respond with no emergency lights or audible warning device

**Not Available** – unit is clear from last assignment but unavailable due to depleted equipment/supplies, mechanical trouble, lack of staffing, etc.

**Off Duty** – end duty shift

**On Duty** – begin duty shift

**On Scene or On Location** – used when units arrive on scene

**On the Air** – used when units leave the station and are not responding to a call for service but available for responses via radio

**Out of Service** – used any time a unit is unavailable to respond or be utilized (this term is **NOT** to be used when units are back in the station returning from previous assignment unless the unit is unable to respond to a call due to equipment or mechanical trouble)

**Responding** – shall be used when units mark responding to an incident. Members should state where they are responding and how many approved personnel are aboard (i.e. *Engine 510 is responding to River Road and Temple Ave with a crew of 3*). This eliminates confusion at the ECC and for other units when multiple incidents are in progress. If a unit is responding from a location other than their assigned quarters, the location from which they are responding shall be given.

**Tanker Taskforce** – a group of pre-identified tankers requested to assist in a rural water supply operation

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**Under Control** – shall be transmitted when the incident is stable or life safety is no longer a concern but units are still on scene

**Victims Extricated** – shall be transmitted when any victim is removed from a hazardous environment or condition

**Weather Warning** – a warning is issued when hazardous weather or a hydrologic event is occurring, is imminent, or has a very high probability of occurring; conditions may pose a threat to life or property

**Weather Watch** – a watch is used when the risk of hazardous weather or a hydrologic event has increased significantly, but its occurrence, location, and/or timing is still uncertain; it is intended to provide enough lead time for those who need to prepare or evacuate can do so

## Channel Assignments:

**FIRE-EMS** – the primary dispatch channel. This channel is on a system repeater.

**TA-FIRE-EMS** – talk-around is a non-repeated channel that can be used for fire-ground/special operations when a non-repeated channel may be required. **NOTE: traffic on this channel can be heard by others monitoring the FIRE-EMS channel within a several mile radius of the transmitting radio but CANNOT be heard by the ECC.**

**FIRE-TAC** – is the primary fire-ground/tactical channel. This channel is on a system repeater.

**EMS-TAC** – is the primary EMS-ground/tactical channel. This channel is on a system repeater.

**TA-FIRE** – talk around fire is a non-repeated channel that can be used for fire-ground/special operations when a non-repeated channel may be required. **NOTE: traffic on this channel can be heard by others monitoring the FIRE-TAC channel within a several mile radius of the transmitting radio but CANNOT be heard by the ECC.**

**TA-EMS** – talk around EMS is a non-repeated channel that can be used for EMS-ground/special operations when a non-repeated channel may be required. **NOTE: traffic on this channel can be heard by others monitoring the EMS TAC channel within a several mile radius of the transmitting radio but CANNOT be heard by the ECC.**

**FIRE-TAC 2** – is a fire-ground/tactical channel. This channel is non-repeated. **NOTE: traffic on this channel can be heard by others monitoring the FIRE-TAC 2 channel within a several mile radius of the transmitting radio but CANNOT be heard by the ECC.**

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**EMS-TAC 2** – is a fire-ground/tactical channel. This channel is non-repeated. **NOTE: traffic on this channel can be heard by others monitoring the EMS-TAC 2 channel within a several mile radius of the transmitting radio but CANNOT be heard by the ECC.**

**COUNTYWIDE** – is an administrative channel that can be used by personnel to communicate with other county departments.

## **Radio Transmission:**

When transmitting on the radio, key the microphone and wait until after the “beep tone” (or about 2 seconds) before speaking. This will allow the repeater to engage and will eliminate radio traffic being cut out.

When calling the Emergency Communications Center (ECC), use a Contact Call and the title “Prince George” or “Headquarters” (i.e.: “Engine 210 to Prince George”). After being acknowledged, proceed with radio traffic. Communications Officers will use a Contact Call when contacting field units.

## **Pre-Alert Tones:**

Alert tones tell fire and EMS personnel to pay attention to the radio for important information. This information could be an announcement, severe weather warning, or an emergency call.

1. **One Pre-Alert Tone** – Used to notify all personnel to hold their radio traffic. Used during Level II Dispatching *see Emergency Response Plan*. (This is “Alert Tone 1” on the ECC console)
2. **Three Pre-Alert Tones** – Used in conjunction with the emergency evacuation signal per policy. (This is “Alert Tone 3” on the ECC console)

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## Knock Out Tones:

Knock out tones are transmitted via two-way radio to alert fire and EMS personnel of a call. Activation of the appropriate tones is essential to alert fire and EMS personnel of an incident. Fire and EMS personnel do not have access to two-way communicators at all times and rely on pagers and station alarms to receive calls.

Calls shall be dispatched as follows:

1. Knock out tones of appropriate fire and/or EMS company(s) or unit(s) is activated.
2. Announce the company(s) and unit(s) assigned to the call; the address; and nature of the incident (brief).
3. When the first EMS apparatus marks enroute or responding, repeat the unit number and give the address, twice with cross-streets, nature of the incident, and additional information to assist the responding personnel with forming an incident action plan.
4. When the first fire apparatus marks enroute or responding, repeat the unit number and give the address, twice with cross-streets, nature of the incident, and additional information to assist the responding personnel with forming an incident action plan.
5. When the first fire or EMS unit arrives on scene, the Attendant-In-Charge or Officer-In-Charge shall establish command and give an arrival report. Dispatch shall repeat the unit establishing command and the arrival report. Command may be transferred as many times necessary to ensure the highest trained/skilled level of Incident Management is achieved and the ECC will be notified of such changes.
6. If any fire company fails to respond within four (4) minutes or EMS transport unit fails to respond within two (2) minutes, then the procedure shall be repeated with the next due company(s) or EMS mutual aid.
7. Should another call be received while the area coverage company(s) are dedicated to a call, dispatch the second call in the following manner:
  - a. Activate the area company(s)
  - b. Activate the next due company(s) or mutual aid as recommended by CAD

The incident commander of the first call will determine if resources are available to divert to the second call.

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## General Announcements:

On occasion there will be announcements to notify members of meetings, training exercises, and work details. Announcements may only be requested by officers and will be phoned into Communications prior to 1800 hours.

## Funeral Announcements:

Upon notification to the Office of Fire and EMS that a member has deceased from a non-line of duty death, the Office of Fire and EMS shall begin gathering information about the details of the arrangements. The Director or designee shall contact the ECC and a Fire All-Call and EMS All-Call page shall be sent out at 1800 hours that evening announcing the death of the member. Members will be asked to contact their Chief for further information not the ECC.

The Director of Fire and EMS will work with the ECC to arrange any grave side announcements and honors of the deceased Fire and EMS Member.

## Weekly Radio Test:

1. For companies 1, 2, 3, Sub-Station 3, and 5, the pagers and siren will be tested at 1900 hours on each Monday.
2. For company 4, the pagers and siren will be tested at 1900 hours on each Wednesday.

## Weather Warnings:

1. The ECC shall activate the fire all-call and EMS all-call pager tones for fire and EMS companies.
  2. Then select all police channels (including all OPS and TAC channels), all fire channels (including TAC channels), and all EMS channels (including all TAC channels).
  3. Announce details of the weather warning (type of weather, time frame, i.e. any other specifics as noted by the National Weather Service and/or teletype).
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4. The ECC shall then text page the county “weather group” with details of the weather warning.

## Weather Watches:

The ECC shall text page the county “weather group” with details of the weather watches.

## Channel Re-Assignment:

During incidents where multiple units are on scene, the Communication Officer may designate those units to operate on an assigned channel. Dispatch shall, utilizing Alert Tone #1, use a single alert tone and advise all units to switch to the assigned channel. The ECC shall also announce whether or not the ECC will be monitoring the assigned channel by stating “the channel is monitored” or “the channel is unmonitored”. All units operating on that incident will switch to the assigned channel. All extended operations (i.e. working fires) will be moved off of the main dispatch channel as soon as feasible or when requested by the Incident Commander. Example (*Alert Tone*) – “All units operating at the Courthouse Road incident switch your operation to FIRE-TAC, the ECC will be monitoring.” All on-scene and responding units will then switch to the assigned TAC channel and remain on that assigned channel until released.

Once the incident is terminated, the Incident Commander shall notify dispatch that the TAC channel can be released. When marking clear from the incident units shall do so on the FIRE-EMS OPS channel.

If the Incident Commander determines that an existing operation should be moved to another channel, the Communication Officer will assign the operation a TAC channel. Communications will make the announcement as described above and advise the Incident Commander if the channel is monitored or unmonitored.

Remember that depending upon availability of resources in the ECC it may not be feasible to immediately move to another channel. The Communication Officer or Incident Commander may request radio channel re-assignment on any incident.

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## Medical Helicopter Requests:

Upon request for a medical helicopter, the Incident Commander shall notify the Communication Officer of necessary details (location of incident, location of helispot, number of helicopters needed, patient info, point of contact, etc.).

1. The Communication Officer will then make contact with the appropriate agency for a helicopter, as per previously established protocol, and initiate the request.
2. Upon notification that a helicopter is enroute, the Communication Officer will advise the responding agency (helicopter) the radio designation (unit number, etc.) of the ground unit that will be the point-of-contact upon approach to the scene/helispot. The Communication Officer will also advise the responding agency the contact channel will be *Statewide EMS*.
3. The Communication Officer will then notify the Incident Commander via radio that the helicopter is enroute and relay any other instructions given by the responding agency (helicopter).
4. The Communication Officer, upon request of the Incident Commander, shall initiate a radio crosspatch link between the Prince George County *Countywide* radio channel and the *Statewide EMS* radio channel. This patch shall remain active until the Incident Commander advises that it can be released.
  - a. In the event *Countywide* is committed to another operation then the Communication Officer may choose an alternate TAC channel and the channel assignment shall be communicated to the Incident Commander.
5. The Incident Commander will assign a unit to prepare the helispot and one (1) person to serve as the point-of-contact via radio for the helicopter at the helispot. The helispot point-of-contact person will switch his/her Prince George County radio to the *Countywide* radio channel to communicate helispot and patient information to the helicopter upon approach.
6. The helispot point-of-contact person should remain on *Countywide* until the helicopter has departed the area and is no longer visible.
7. It is important to note that the Incident Commander may not be monitoring *Countywide*, so if the helispot is not within close proximity to and visible from the incident scene, the helispot point-of-contact should notify the Incident Commander when the helicopter is on the ground, departed, and other information that may be pertinent.
8. Once the helicopter has departed, all radio traffic should return to the designated incident operation channel and the Incident Commander shall notify the Communication Officer that the channel and crosspatch can be released.

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9. The Communication Officer at the ECC ***will not*** be required to monitor the *Countywide* channel during helicopter operations.

## **Command Designation:**

The first fire and/or EMS units arriving on scene shall provide a brief detailed arrival report consisting of existing conditions, officer/member in-command, and shall name the incident. Communications shall repeat the arrival report, officer-in-command, the incident name, and make those notes in CAD. The Incident Commander will designate the incident name by utilizing the name of the street, location, or familiar business name (*Courthouse Road Command, James River Drive Command, Ace Hardware Command, etc.*). To avoid confusion, the use of numbers in the incident name should be avoided (460, Rt. 10). For incidents on the interstate, avoid saying “95 command” – instead use “I-95 command”. When using a business or other location names, consider whether or not it is easily recognizable by other responding units – including mutual aid resources.

On a routine EMS incident, identifying the Incident Commander will be all that is required.

## **Example:**

*“Engine 110 to Prince George (contact call - await response from the ECC). Engine 110 is on scene with a two story residential home heavy smoke showing from the second floor, Engine 110 has accountability Unit 113 will be county drive command.”*

Dispatch will repeat *“Engine 110 is on scene with a two story residential home heavy smoke showing from the second floor, Engine 110 has accountability Unit 113 will be county drive command.”*

**\*\* All incident radio transmissions directed to the Emergency Communications Center will originate from the Incident Commander except under situations that may jeopardize life safety.**

## **WatchDog Timer**

In an effort to ensure safety of all fire and EMS personnel operating on an incident and to provide operational timeframe references, the ECC shall conduct status checks every 15 minutes from the time of arrival until the incident commander marks the situation under control for selected calls for service.

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## Update Procedure:

The Incident Commander should notify Communications of the following, when necessary:

1. Victims extricated (accidents)
2. All clear on the structure
3. Situation under control
4. Helicopter has landed/departed
5. Water on the fire
6. Any other important benchmarks at an incident

## Building Evacuation Procedure:

The Incident Commander, Safety Officer, or any other on-scene personnel who observes a potential for building collapse, flashover, backdraft or other life-hazard, during fire suppression operations, shall announce over the radio **MAYDAY... MAYDAY... MAYDAY – EVACUATE THE BUILDING**. At this time, the Incident Commander will take control of all radio traffic and order **ALL AIR HORNS** to be sounded for **THREE (3) 5-SECOND BLASTS**. All interior and exterior suppression operations will cease and the building will be immediately evacuated, without regard for equipment.

Upon exiting the building all personnel will report to the Command Post and an accountability check and physical roll call will be conducted. All personnel must be present and answer to their name. If any person does not answer, the Incident Commander shall immediately initiate and direct a coordinated search to establish the location and safety of missing individuals. Existing incident conditions (example; fire conditions, structural integrity, etc.), life safety of missing personnel (survivability), and of searchers shall be considered when deciding strategy and tactics and the ordering of any search and rescue operation.

The Incident Commander shall advise the ECC to activate the building evacuation procedures. The ECC shall activate Alert Tone #3 and shall announce on all channels **“All Units Operating at (Incident Name) Evacuate The Building Immediately.”** This shall be repeated three (3) times (**Alert tone... Statement, Repeat Twice**). After first three (3) times the Incident Commander will advise if there is a need to repeat.

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## Mutual Aid:

When mutual aid is requested by other localities, Communications will notify the appropriate company and/or EMS unit. Communications will ascertain what type of unit is needed (ALS, BLS, Engine, Truck, etc.) and will dispatch the requested resource(s) unless unavailable.

Unless there are extenuating circumstances, Prince George EMS units will only respond to mutual aid requests if staff is available to maintain at least one ambulance in service for response in the County.

- 1 EMS transport unit is available, we do not have enough units to provide mutual aid
- 2 or more EMS transport units are available, send the closest unit

Any fire calls for service for FCI are to be routed to Fort Lee Fire Department for an initial response. Any EMS calls for service are to be handled by Prince George Fire and EMS. If no EMS unit is available, Communications will follow normal mutual aid procedures.

## No Available Unit (EMS):

When the last available EMS transport unit marks responding to an incident, the ECC shall acknowledge the unit and immediately initiate the NAU timestamp to alert all EMS personnel via text page that there are no EMS transport units staffed.

If an additional call for service is received while there are no available transport units in service, the ECC shall alert all EMS personnel via the EMS all call button on the radio console and dispatch the call. Mutual Aid will be contacted immediately following the dispatch of the call for service.

## Disregards:

All disregards are to be given by the Incident Commander if they have the equipment/personnel/training to handle the situation. If the Incident Commander disregards all units prior to the first apparatus arriving, the closest apparatus will continue non-emergency to accomplish a report. Communications shall acknowledge and repeat that all or certain units can disregard.

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It will be at the discretion of the fire officer or unit responding to disregard or continue a non-emergency response to all fire alarm activations that have been cancelled by the Alarm Company or occupant. The ECC shall announce, via two-way radio, when they receive a call from the Alarm Company or occupant to cancel a fire response.

## Police Officer Dispatch Protocol:

Upon notification of a medical emergency that an individual is choking, not breathing, unresponsive, or any indication of these situations, the Communication Officer will notify and assign the closest appropriate police officer to the location. Police Officers will also be dispatched to incidents where the safety of the fire or EMS personnel may be in jeopardy.

## Code 99:

Upon notification from a trained medical provider of a patient in full medical or cardiac arrest, the dispatcher shall activate pagers via the EMS all call button along with the first due fire company and announce "code 99 at (address)". When adequate personnel arrive at the scene, it will be the responsibility of the Attendant-In-Charge to notify the ECC. When notified, the Communication Officer shall announce that adequate personnel are on the scene.

The Communication Officer can also dispatch an EMS call for service as a C99. If the Communication Officer begins CPR per EMD instructions, the Communication Officer will treat the call as a C99. If the Communication Officer starts CPR prior to dispatching units, the Communication Officer will alert and dispatch all EMS units and the first due fire company. If the Communication Officer has already dispatched units to a call for service and during the call, begins CPR per EMD, the Communication Officer will immediately activate the EMS all call and the first due fire company.

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## Restricted Traffic:

Remember that citizens and other county services may be monitoring radio traffic.

**At no time will information be broadcasted over the radio with regards to HIV, HBV, or other specific communicable diseases. If the caller volunteers this information, tell the caller to advise the crew when they arrive.**

**At no time shall profanity, slang, racial comments, religious comments, or other socially unacceptable language be used on the radio system.**

The radio system shall only be used for County approved radio traffic. The radio system shall not be used as a personal communication device or for personal gain. Any radio traffic, which is not deemed in the best interest of the County, is strictly prohibited.

## Fire and EMS Administration Page:

To ensure consistent communications within our organization, it is requested that the "Fire Admin" group be paged on all of the following incidents:

1. Working structure fires
2. Code 99
3. Fires in commercial buildings
4. MVA with confirmed entrapments
5. Hazardous material incidents
6. Fires involving fatalities or injuries
7. Mutual aid provided to surrounding localities (excluding Carson to Dinwiddie)
8. Four or more companies committed to call(s)
9. Vehicle crashes involving fire or EMS apparatus

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10. Per request of the incident commander or officer-in-charge

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