



COMMUNICATIONS OPERATIONS
LAW ENFORCEMENT POLICY

Policy No. 4361 Date Issued: March 12, 2001
Section: 4300 - Radio Procedures Date Revised: February 12, 2018
SUBJECT: USE OF SECONDARY CHANNELS
APPROVED: [Signature] Chairperson, Law Enforcement Users Subcommittee
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1.0 Policy

The intent of this policy is to organize the use of available law enforcement radio channels in such a way that NetCom and field officers have clear and unobstructed radio access to manage hazardous and/or extraordinary incidents. The model for this policy is the Incident Command System (ICS) communications protocol.

2.0 Procedure

2.1 Definitions

- 2.1.1 Dispatch Channel: the primary channel for initial dispatch of incidents and communications between the field and NetCom.
2.1.2 Command Channel: when assigned, used by the Incident Commander, general staff, command staff, branch/unit leaders, division/group supervisors and NetCom.
2.1.3 Tactical Channel: used by field and other staff for unit to unit communications.

2.2 General Use

2.2.1 The dispatch channel for each law enforcement agency is commonly referred to as the “Blue” channel.

2.2.1.1 Under normal conditions, all dispatch to unit traffic will occur on the dispatch channel including the initial dispatch of incidents. All unit traffic to dispatch will occur on the dispatch channel, including incident related and unit initiated activity.

2.2.2 Most law enforcement agencies have a secondary channel, commonly referred to as the “Yellow” or “Red”, depending on the agency. Some agencies have more than one secondary channel.

2.2.2.1 Under normal conditions, unit to unit traffic will occur on a simplex or secondary channel and units will use the dispatch channel for communications with the dispatch center. When used in this manner, the secondary channel is a tactical channel. When a secondary channel is identified as an alternate method of communications with NetCom, it becomes a command channel.

2.2.3 During a large incident, the available channels may be utilized in any combination of ways to best facilitate the management of the large incident.

2.2.3.1 Although a secondary channel can be requested by any field unit or supervisor, only NetCom may assign (or approve) the use of a secondary channel based on staffing and traffic loads within the Center.

2.3 Tactical Frequency Use

2.3.1 A tactical frequency may be used at any time for unit to unit communication. As such, a tactical channel is not “guarded”, however NetCom dispatchers will monitor tactical channels as workload allows and their responsibility for traffic on the dispatch (primary) channel will always take priority over tactical channel communications. The use of a tactical frequency for unit to unit communications is highly encouraged to help keep the dispatch channel available for priority traffic.

2.3.2 A tactical frequency may be assigned for a specific incident:

- ◆ Upon request of a law enforcement agency.
- ◆ When more than one law enforcement agency is responding to an incident.
- ◆ When available for drills or radio equipment tests.
- ◆ As deemed necessary by NetCom to clear the dispatch channel for emergency traffic.

2.3.3 Units using a tactical channel will communicate with NetCom via a command or dispatch channel.

2.3.3.1 If a unit has urgent traffic and command or dispatch channel selection is inconvenient, it is permissible to try NetCom on the tactical channel. If possible, NetCom will respond to the broadcast on the same tactical channel.

2.3.4 A tactical channel may be used by auxiliary units or allied agencies. Allied agencies should refer to their use agreement with the licensing law enforcement agency. Auxiliary units should switch to the dispatch channel if they have an emergency and do not get a response from NetCom on the tactical (secondary) channel.

2.4 Command Channel Use

2.4.1 A command channel may be assigned:

- ◆ Upon request of a law enforcement agency.
- ◆ As deemed necessary by NetCom to clear the dispatch channel for emergency traffic.

2.4.2 Types of incidents that may require a command channel include: pursuits, Project ROPE, an escalating single incident (armed robbery, barricaded subject, etc.), or a large scale disaster.

2.4.3 NetCom will normally use the available secondary channels when assigning a command channel. However, it may be appropriate -- based upon incident specifics -- to assign the dispatch channel as the command channel and identify a secondary channel as a temporary dispatch channel.