S.O.P. #:   300-14

SUBJECT: EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

DIVISION: COMMUNICATIONS

Objective: It is the responsibility of the Fire Department to prepare an Emergency Communications Plan should a major disruption or total loss of Dispatch communications occur. The objective of these procedures will provide the necessary response and actions to be taken by the various divisions of our department. The plan is developed to respond to two (2) types of conditions: Failsoft, and Partial and/or complete loss of communications.

Section 1:   Failsoft Condition

The Baltimore County 800 MHz Communications System has several levels of redundancy and the ability to self-diagnose and correct the majority of problems which could occur. Should the Central Controllers fail, the system goes into Failsoft. In Failsoft, the system reverts from the trunked radio system to a conventional repeater system.

When in Failsoft, the user will hear an open carrier, and a beep every 10 seconds as an indication that we are no longer operating in a normal Trunked Environment. Personnel are reminded that in Failsoft, the EMERGENCY feature will not operate.

A.   Should the system go into Failsoft, the following actions are to be taken by field personnel:

1.   Companies operating on incidents that are using FGC and/or TAC Talkgroups when Failsoft occurs, will automatically revert back to their divisional Talkgroup; i.e., CENT-2, EAST-3 WEST-4,. All voice communications should cease on all conference talkgroups: EM-OPS-5, ADMIN-6, FM/SUP-7, EMS-8, FI-FP-9 and ACAD-95, unless there is an emergency communications requirement.

2.   All voice communications should be limited to field emergency operations.

3.   EMS consultations should not be instituted. Any in progress consultations should be continued and finalized. EMS personnel should revert back to MIEMSS UHF communications equipment.

4.   If the Fire Rescue Academy is conducting LIVE fire evolution's, they should, as soon as possible, have all personnel involved in the incident switch to Talkgroup 95. Instructors should consider the use of a conventional talkaround talkgroup and have one unit maintain communications with Dispatch on Talkgroup 95.

5.   No field personnel will perform changeover to first line apparatus until the Failsoft situation is resolved and the trunk system is back in operation.

B.   Should the system go into Failsoft, the following actions are to be taken by Dispatch personnel.

1.   Dispatch will have portables at their console and ready for use.

2.   Companies operating on incidents that are using FGC and or TAC Talkgroups when Failsoft occurs will automatically revert back to their divisional Talkgroup. Dispatch will verify with COMMAND that communications are intact.

3.   ADO will notify the on duty Division Chief and Officer in Charge of Communications should Failsoft continue for a period greater than 3 minutes or they receive additional direction from the Operations Officer after consultation with on duty ES/T personnel.

Section 2:   Partial/Complete Loss of Communications

The Baltimore County Communications System must develop alternate means of command and control should the system partially or completely fail. This plan should account for the sudden and complete failure of the 800 MHz Trunked Communications System. The Fire Department's plan is one part of the County's Emergency Communications Plan which incorporates various other agencies which either provide support to, or are responsible for, the re-establishment of the system as quickly as possible.

A.   Should the system completely or partially fail, the following actions are to be taken by field personnel:

1.   All Emergency Operations vehicles should return to their home stations. All non-emergency activities should cease immediately. Units that are at other stations for details; i.e., training, should contact Dispatch via telephone for direction.

2.   Stations may be dispatched via the backup 46.46 MHz Alerting and Paging System. Stations may also be alerted by Red Phone, Centrex telephone, or printer. All station telephones will be restricted for emergency information from Dispatch.

3.   Units should contact Dispatch utilizing the local telephone system, when they are alerted and when they arrive . If units are being dispatched to an area where there is no timely means to make contact with Dispatch, an additional unit will be dispatched or taken to the incident for the function of maintaining a communication resource.

4.   Units that are on incidents should immediately operate on their assigned talk-around channel. Personnel are reminded that their mobile radio has greater talk-around coverage than the a portable. In multi-unit incidents COMMAND will ensure that all units on the scene switch to the proper talk-around channel. They will also account for all personnel assigned to the incident.

5.   Should a major incident occur, Dispatch may alert a Mutual Aid Unit to respond to the scene for the sole purpose of providing communications relayed over FMARS.

B.   Should the system completely or partially fail, the following actions are to be taken by Dispatch:

1.   The Baltimore County Emergency Communications Plan is to be initiated.

2.   The CSS should immediately activate the backup 46.46 MHz alerting and paging system if it is needed.

3.   All stations will be alerted. Dispatch should contact each respective DC/BC at their office and have them notify all career stations under their command.

a.   All Career watch desks will be staffed.

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     b.   All volunteer stations are to be alerted for standby crews by 46.46 Alerting/Paging System, if available.

     c.   Dispatch will notify the designated BCVFA authorities, who will, in turn, notify by telephone appropriate volunteer company officers.

     d.   Dispatch will contact staff personnel with cellular telephones and arrange for them to be assigned as needed for incidents in Baltimore County.

4.   ADO will notify the on duty Division Chief, Division Chief responsible for Communications, Officer in Charge of Communications, and Administrative Lieutenant of Communications about the situation.

     a.   The Officer in Charge of Communications and or the Administrative Lieutenant shall report to Fire Dispatch.

     b.   They shall gather the necessary information and as soon as possible report the current status to the on duty Division Chief.

5.   Dispatch will not honor request for mutual aid assistance to surrounding jurisdictions until the communications system is restored.