Operating Guideline # 1000	
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Radio Communications Protocols & Dispatch Procedures	
June 30, 2025	

1.0 PURPOSE

This guideline outlines communication procedures for contacting Dispatch, acknowledging calls, standing down stations, paging protocols, radio channel assignments, and best practices for radio use.

1.1 ISSUE / RATIONALE

Clear, disciplined communication ensures effective response, operational safety, and consistent coordination among crews and Dispatch. Given that Dispatch is shared with multiple emergency services, consistent radio etiquette is essential to prevent confusion and ensure timely coordination.

2.0 CONTACTING DISPATCH BY LANDLINE

- Only the Duty Officer (Chief on Call) and Division Chiefs are permitted to contact Dispatch via landline.
- All other requests must be relayed via radio to the Duty Officer or Division Chief.
- Firefighters, Captains, and District Chiefs are not authorized to contact Dispatch directly by landline.

3.0 RADIO ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF CALLS

- MLFD does not acknowledge calls over the radio upon initial receipt.
- If others are responding on Who's Responding, notify Dispatch using the truck radio upon arrival at the station.
- If arriving alone and no one else is attending per Who's Responding, no radio transmission is required.

4.0 STANDING DOWN ANOTHER STATION

- Do not stand down another station unless:
    - You are in an apparatus responding to a medical or alarm call, and
    - You determine that additional resources are not required.
- For MVCs, rescues, and fires, apparatus must be on scene before standing down additional stations, with confirmation that further assistance is unnecessary.

5.0 PAGING PROTOCOLS – STATION RESPONSE ESCALATION

- *Initial Paging:* Dispatch will page the primary station. Officers should switch to the open channel and begin monitoring radio communications while en route to the station.
- *Second Station Paging:* If no apparatus contacts Dispatch within 15 minutes, a second station will be paged.
    - *Exception:* For critical calls, Dispatch may escalate sooner and must notify the Duty Officer.
- *On-Scene Requests:* The Incident Commander may request additional stations as needed.

6.0 ESTABLISHING RADIO CONTACT

When advising that a unit is responding, on scene, or in service, do not simply identify yourself and give your message in a single transmission.

Dispatch services are shared with multiple agencies, and they may need time to switch between channels. To ensure your message is properly received:

- Begin by establishing contact using a preliminary call such as: *"Muskoka Lakes Fire Dispatch, Muskoka Lakes Pump 6 calling..."*
- Wait for acknowledgment if appropriate or pause briefly before delivering the full message.
- This protocol ensures Dispatch is aware that a fire unit is about to transmit and reduces the risk of missed or incomplete information.

7.0 RADIO COMMUNICATION – BEST PRACTICES & TERMINOLOGY

- Listen first to avoid interrupting active radio traffic.
- Keep transmissions brief and clear.
- Use a calm, clear tone and proper mic technique. Avoid background noise.
- Use official unit designations (e.g., "Pump 1," "Command 1 Alpha").
- Provide 30-minute status updates to Dispatch when appropriate.
- Use standard benchmarks and operational terms (e.g., "Under Control," "Primary All Clear").
- Do not use 10-codes, slang, or filler phrases (e.g., "Be advised," "At this time," "Over and out").
- All communications shall be in clear text.
- Avoid using courtesy phrases like "thank you" or "please" over the radio — they unnecessarily use airtime.

8.0 STANDARD TERMINOLOGY & BENCHMARKS

Term / Phrase	Definition	Example Transmission
Did Not Copy	Signal not received or unclear	"Pump 6 to Tank 6 – I DID NOT COPY."
(Unit) Copies	Acknowledgment that message was received	"Pump 6 COPIES – cancel the call."
Affirmative	Yes	"Pump 11 – AFFIRMATIVE."
Negative	No	"Pump 11 to Command – NEGATIVE."
Responding	En route to assigned emergency	"Pump 5 is RESPONDING."
Out of Service Mechanical	Unit not operational due to mechanical issue	"Pump 1 is OUT OF SERVICE MECHANICAL."
Out of Service Minimum Staffing	Unit unavailable due to insufficient personnel	"Pump 9 is OUT OF SERVICE MINIMUM STAFFING."
In Service	Unit is available and able to respond	"Pump 44 IN SERVICE."
Stand By	Unit or station to remain intact and ready for assignment	"Command to Pump 3 – STAND BY for now."
On Scene	Unit has arrived at the incident location	"Pump 7 ON SCENE."
In Quarters	Unit has returned to its home station	"Pump 77 IN QUARTERS."
Smoke Showing	Visible smoke or fire present	"Main Street Command to Dispatch – we have SMOKE SHOWING."
Fully Involved	Structure is fully engulfed in fire	"Main Street Command to Dispatch – the building is FULLY INVOLVED."
Primary All Clear	Initial search completed; no victims found	"Main Street Command to Dispatch – we have a PRIMARY ALL CLEAR."
Under Control	Fire is contained; no further extension expected	"Main Street Command – fire is UNDER CONTROL."
Loss Stopped	Further property damage has been prevented	"Main Street Command – LOSS STOPPED."
Patient Contact	Contact made with patient at incident scene	"Pump 2 – PATIENT CONTACT made."
Rescue Initiated	Rescue operations have begun	"Rescue 1 – RESCUE INITIATED on trapped occupant."
Arrived at Alarm Point	Personnel have reached the alarm's location	"Pump 8 – ARRIVED AT ALARM POINT, no signs of fire."
Waiting on Staffing	Unit is at the station and will respond once sufficient personnel arrive	"Pump 6, waiting on staffing."
Patient removed to…	Patient has been removed from hazard and transferred to another agency or area of care	"Patient removed from vehicle and in care of EMS"