


Ames Fire Department Standard Operating Guidelines

Book: 3 – Emergency Operations
Section: 1 – Alarms and General Response Procedures
Chapter: 1 – **Incident Communications**
Date Approved: 04-05-2025 Revision No.: New

Approved by: 

PURPOSE:

To ensure proper radio etiquette and manage two-way radio traffic. To limit communication failures due to overly busy radio talk groups or confusion with radio traffic crossing between incident scenes.

POLICY:

Proper radio etiquette is essential for clear, efficient communication. It ensures messages are concise, easily understood, free from ambiguity, and prevents unnecessary congestion. Standardized phrases and procedures help avoid errors and misunderstanding.

Separate tactical radio talk groups will be assigned on every Ames Fire Department incident to prevent communications from one incident scene affecting operations on a separate, unrelated incident scene.

PROCEDURES:

Standard Radio Etiquette

Public safety communicators are continually monitoring multiple agencies, using multiple radio talk groups, during a variety of situations that divide their attentions. Always request to speak with the intended recipient prior to sending the message. This ensures you have their attention, and they can receive the message effectively.

- Use the “Hey you, it’s me” method to alert the recipient you have a message. Identify the recipient, then yourself, and then where to find you.
 - Example: “Ames dispatch, from Engine 1 on Fire Tac 1.”
- Wait for acknowledgment prior to sending the message, then keep messages brief and clear.
- Confirm and repeat critical information. “Copy” should not be a stand-alone statement and must be followed with the critical information that was received.

Station Radios while Awaiting Incident Assignment


During normal daily operations, Radio #1 at every station must remain set to Ames Fire Ops (AFD Ops.) This ensures the station alerting system (e.g., Locution) is broadcast and heard on AFD Ops throughout the stations. Radio #2 remains available for scanning and/or transmitting on talk groups other than AFD Ops.

Dispatch and Assignment of Talk Groups

Ames Public Safety Communications and Iowa State University Dispatch will independently alert the Ames Fire Department of incoming emergency incidents via the

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station alerting system (e.g., Locution) at the fire stations and over the radio on AFD Ops.

The dispatching entity will select an available tactical talk group (TAC) and assign it to the incident, reporting the chosen TAC to all responding units.

- Primary TACs for Ames Fire:
 - Ames FTAC 1 (AFD TAC 1)
 - Ames FTAC 2 (AFD TAC 2)
 - Ames FTAC 3 (AFD TAC 3)
 - Ames FTAC 4 (AFD TAC 4)
 - Ames FTAC 5 (AFD TAC 5)
 - Ames FTAC 6 (AFD TAC 6)
- Additional talk groups may be assigned from the StoryComm system but need to be coordinated throughout the county prior to assignment.
- If no additional talk groups are assigned after primary TACs are in use, continue operation on AFD Ops until a primary TAC is available.

If a TAC is not assigned by the communication center, the initial responding unit will request one.

Transitioning from AFD Ops to TAC

The initial primary communication with the appropriate communication center will occur via the Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) and on AFD Ops, including but not limited to:

- Reporting en route to the incident scene.
- Requesting additional resources.
- Updating the communication center on additional information received.


The first arriving fire department unit will report on-scene, assume command, and give an initial size-up and assignments on AFD Ops. They will then announce they are transitioning to the assigned TAC, by name. Follow up communications including any 360° assessment and assignments will occur on the TAC.

Later arriving units will report their arrival to Incident Command via the TAC and will utilize the MDT to indicate arrival to dispatch. They should refrain from announcing arrival on AFD Ops.

Firefighters will turn individual portable radios to the TAC prior to arriving on-scene to ensure seamless on-scene communication is maintained. Fire officers and apparatus

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drivers may choose to turn vehicle mounted mobile radios to the TAC at any time to maintain communication en route and on-scene.

Incident Specific Communications

For single company responses, all responding personnel are expected to utilize the TAC for incident communications among the crew members, as well as to provide incoming medical responders with patient information and updates. Transmissions with the communication center and incoming resources should be attempted on the TAC only once. If contact is not established, switch to AFD Ops. Once the initial conversation is complete, return to TAC as soon as possible.

For multi-company responses, only the on-duty Shift Commander will continue to monitor AFD Ops for overlapping incidents or other requests for resources. They will maintain this responsibility until relieved of it by supporting Command Staff. Lieutenants should not carry two radios for this purpose at any time.

Call-back Command Staff, who typically report en route from home, will do so on AFD Ops. In addition, they will report arrival on scene or at the fire station on AFD Ops. The on-scene Shift Commander will be able to hear it while not interrupting on-scene communications. Once on-scene, Command Staff will transition to the TAC for scene communications.

Transitioning from TAC, back to AFD Ops, and releasing TACs for reassignment

The TAC should be used until the incident is closed. Units clearing the scene prior to incident closure can do so via the MDT and/or the radio on AFD Ops. The last unit to leave the scene will close the incident with the communication center. This will release the TAC for reassignment within CAD.

DEFINITIONS:

Clearing an incident scene: A unit released from an active incident scene with additional responders remaining. (Unit will report clear of the scene on AFD Ops, but the TAC remains assigned to the scene.)

Closing an incident scene: A unit which is the last to leave the incident scene releasing the scene to responsible parties. (Unit will report the scene closed on AFD Ops, and the TAC is released for reassignment on CAD.)