

San Mateo County Fire Service
Policy & Guideline Manual

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Communication Plan

P-228.1 PURPOSE & SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to establish a standard procedure for the use of radio channels and call signs. This standard radio procedure will be used in the four geographical radio zones that currently exist: South, Central, North, and Central Coast.

P-228.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the San Mateo County Fire Chiefs that all fire units follow the procedures for radio channels and call sign usage outlined in this policy.

P-228.3 REFERENCES

N/A

P-228.4 PROCEDURES

San Mateo County has numerous channels available for both operations and tactical assignments. These channels, including their definitions, use, and zones are defined below.

Display	Call Sign	Zone / Purpose	Type
CON 1A	Control 1	South Dispatch	Repeated
CMD 11	Command 11	South Command	Repeated
TAC 15	N/A	South Tactical	Simplex
TAC 16	N/A	South Tactical	Simplex
TAC 17	N/A	South Tactical	Simplex
CON 2	Control 2	Central Dispatch	Repeated
CMD 21	Command 21	Central Command	Repeated
TAC 25	N/A	Central Tactical	Simplex
TAC 26	N/A	Central Tactical	Simplex
TAC 27	N/A	Central Tactical	Simplex

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CON 3	Control 3	North Dispatch	Repeated
CMD 31	Command 31	North Command	Repeated
TAC 35	N/A	North Tactical	Simplex
TAC 36	N/A	North Tactical	Simplex
TAC 37	N/A	North Tactical	Simplex
CON 1B	Control 1	Half Moon Bay Dispatch	Repeated
CON 1C	Control 1	Pigeon Pt. Dispatch	Repeated
CON 1D	Control 1	La Honda Dispatch	Repeated
CON 1E	Control 1	Pescadero Dispatch	Repeated
CMD 41	Command 41	South Coast Command	Repeated
TAC 45	N/A	South Coast Tactical	Simplex
TAC 46	N/A	South Coast Tactical	Simplex
TAC 47	N/A	South Coast Tactical	Simplex
CMD 51	Command 51	Command	Repeated

1. Channel definitions and usage:

a. Dispatch Channels

Each zone has one repeated Dispatch channel. Dispatch channels are utilized for dispatch, single unit responses, unit tracking, resource movement and deployment. Dispatch channels are not labeled in CAD.

A Dispatch channel will be used for selected freeway incidents (i.e. medical call, vehicle fire, trash fire, and public assist) involving the response of two fire engines, the primary response engine and the opposite direction response engine.

The Dispatch channel will be assigned for multi-unit responses when the Zone Command channel has reached its capacity.

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b. Command Channels

Each zone has one repeated Command channel that is used for multi-unit responses. A command channel is automatically assigned based on incident type and resource allocation. Once dispatched, all units on a multi-unit response shall respond on the assigned command channel. All radio traffic pertaining to the assignment should take place on the Command Channel (e.g. a unit attaching themselves, etc.).

The Command channel shall be used for initial size-up, establishing IC, communications between PSC and the IC and communications between Staging and the IC. The IC shall announce "Units switch to the Tactical Channel upon arrival." Units arriving on scene after the first unit shall announce their arrival on the Tactical Channel (see below "Tactical Channels"). The Command Channel is not intended for tactical radio traffic.

Command channels are labeled CMxxxx in CAD. X's indicate the command channel number and dispatch sequence.

An additional Command channel (CMD 51) is available in most bayside areas for use during large-scale or long term incidents. The channel may also be used for wide area administrative radio communications. CMD 51's geographic coverage is expected to increase as its infrastructure is expanded with additional funding. Once complete, CMD 51 will provide coverage to most areas of the County. CMD 51 will also be assigned for all water incidents on the Bay Side.

A portable Command repeater (VTac36) can be requested through PSC (Com98) for use at large-scale, long term or other special events where an isolated Command repeater is desired. Depending on the location of the event, set up time can usually be within 60 minutes. PSC does not have the ability to communicate on VTac36.

c. Tactical Channels

Each zone has (non-repeated) simplex tactical channels that are utilized for on-scene incident (Fire Ground) communications. A Tactical channel is automatically assigned based on incident type and resource allocation. The IC may request a tactical channel if one has not been assigned or additional tactical channels are necessary.

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After IC has been established, units assigned to the incident shall switch to the tactical channel as they approach the incident (i.e. one block from incident) and announce their arrival on scene on the Tactical Channel. It is the responsibility of on-scene command personnel to monitor tactical radio traffic. PSC's reception coverage is limited due to the restriction of mobile/portable use only. Tactical channels are labeled TACxx in CAD. X's indicate the tactical channel number.

d. Greater Alarms and Staging

When units responding to an incident as part of a greater alarm arrive on scene they should check-in with the Staging Area Manager face-to-face. If none has been established the first unit arriving at the staging location shall establish staging and announce this to the IC on the Command Channel.

e. Channel Assignments

The most appropriate Command or Tactical channel is automatically assigned upon dispatch.

The Incident Commander should consider requesting additional Tactical Channels as the scale of event increases. The IC should ensure that sufficient command personnel are present and that all personnel assigned to ICS positions have an adequate supply of radios (a minimum of two radios) to support a change to the communications plan.

Whenever an incident starts as a single unit response and additional units are assigned/attached a Command Channel should be assigned/requested. An exception would be a single unit freeway response with an opposite engine (e.g. medical aid, vehicle fire, trash fire, etc.).

2. Other Channels:

a. VFire Channels

VFire 21 is utilized for specific auto and mutual aid incidents with neighboring counties including, but not limited to, SFO responses, and SFFD auto aid. VFire 21 is a command channel only and shall not be used for tactical traffic.

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VFire 22 - VFire25 are utilized for wildland assignments county wide and multi-resource assignments in Battalion 15 to facilitate potential communications with non-San Mateo County apparatus.

b. Standby Tactical Channel

In San Mateo County VFire 26 is reserved for use county-wide as the Standby Tactical Channel. When a RIC deployment occurs, the firefighter in need and the RIC team remain on the original Tac channel. All other units on scene switch to the Standby Tactical Channel (VFire26) to continue normal operations. VFire 26 may be used in other Counties just like VFire22 – VFire25.

c. CALCORD

CALCORD shall be utilized for communication between air and ground resources such as a Helicopter Landing Zone (LZ).

d. Travel Channel

The Travel Channel (CESRS-TN) is limited to ground resources en route to/from an incident outside their home unit. This channel will not be used as a tactical net, nor will it be used for routine administrative traffic. The primary functions and uses of the Travel Channel (CESRS-TN) shall be defined as:

- i. Emergency vehicle to dispatch communications
- ii. Emergency car-to-car communications
- iii. Initial contact, recall and/or reassignment of personnel and equipment
- iv. Contact channel during long distance travel by overhead, strike team, etc.

Units traveling out of county on assignments shall not use San Mateo County radio channels.

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3. Other procedures:

a. Roll call

CAD monitors in BC vehicles display the status of resources assigned to an incident. As such, no roll call of responding apparatus is necessary unless the first-due BC's CAD monitor is out of service.

b. Verbiage

Radio discipline shall be exhibited at all times on emergency incidents. Face to face communication should be used when practical to limit fire ground radio traffic.

Clear text shall be used when operating on Fire Channels. Allowable exceptions are:

10-4, Code 2, Code 3, Priority 1, Priority 3

Field units calling Public Safety Communications will state the channel they are on followed by their identifier. Example:

"Control 1, Engine 7"

Field units calling another field unit will refer to the unit they are calling followed by their field identifier and then state the channel they are on. Example:

"Engine 9, Battalion 3 on Command 11"

Field units operating on VFire21 or other shared channels will refer to Public Safety Communications as "San Mateo County" then state the channel they are on. Example:

"San Mateo County, Engine 13 on VFire21"

Personnel requiring contact with a specific person in a Company shall call the assignment that the individual occupies. Example:

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“Operator 23, Engine 23”

Valid call signs include:

Engine/Truck (for Captain)	“E23 or T23”
Operator (for Operator / Engineer)	“E23 Operator” or “T23 Operator”
Rider 1 or 2 (jump seat rider)	“E23/T23 Rider 1” or “E23 Rider 2”
Tiller (tiller operator)	“T23 Tiller”

c. BART Communications

Standard San Mateo County communications protocols shall be used during incidents at BART facilities or on BART tracks located above ground. BART Operation Control Center (OCC) may be contacted if necessary using the Red Emergency Phones located near the ticket booths.

For incidents underground refer to the “San Mateo County Fire Department Response to BART Emergencies” manual. All San Mateo County Fire Agencies with BART underground facilities have been provided 800 MHz portable radios. Radio antenna cable in the track-way relays 800 MHz radio transmissions throughout the underground.

PERSONNEL ASSIGNMENT OR APPARATUS TYPE	ON AIR IDENTIFIER	CAD IDENTIFIER (San Bruno as the example)
Air Attack	“Air Attack 460”	N/A
Air Tanker	“Tanker 805”	N/A
Ambulance (AMR)	Unit Number (e.g. “Medic 262”)	Unit Number (e.g. “M262”)
Ambulance (ESF)	Rescue Unit number (e.g. “Rescue 61”)	Unit Number (e.g. “R61”)
AMR Supervisor	Unit Number (e.g. “S10”)	Unit Number (e.g. “AS10”)
Battalion Chief / Duty	“Battalion 16”	BC16
Battalion Chief / EMS	“Med 16”	MED16

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Battalion Chief / Extra staffing (not recommendable)	"Battalion 16A"	BC16A, BC16B BC16C
Battalion Chief / Extra staffing (recommendable)	"Battalion 116"	BC116
Battalion Chief / Special Ops	"Special Ops 16"	SO16
Boat	"Boat 51"	BOAT51
Breathing Support	"Breathing Support 51"	BS51
Bulldozer (e.g. CZU)	"Dozer 1741"	N/A
Bulldozer Transport (e.g. CZU)	"Dozer Transport 1741"	N/A
Chief / Assistant or Deputy	"Chief 16A"	CH16A
Communications / IDT	"Comm 16"	COM16
Emergency Manager	"OES 35"	OES 35
Fire Buffs	"Support 51"	SUP51
Fire Chief	"Chief 16"	CH16
Fire Marshal	"Prevention 16"	PR16
Deputy Fire Marshal Assistant Fire Marshal Fire Inspectors / Investigators	"Prevention 16A"	PR16A, PR16B PR16C, PR16D
Hand Crew (e.g. Ben Lomond Hand Crew)	"Ben Lomond Crew1"	N/A
Hazmat	"Hazmat 51"	HM51
Helicopter (e.g. SCU)	"Copter 106"	N/A
Mechanic	"Repair 16"	REP16
Quint	"Quint 51"	Q51 (prefix "P" if ALS)
Rescue	"Rescue 51"	R51 (prefix "B" if BLS)
Squad	"Squad 451"	SQ451 (prefix "B" if BLS)
Training	"Training 16"	TO16
Truck	"Truck 51"	T51 (prefix "P" if ALS)

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Truck / Temporarily Staffed Additional Truck	"Truck 151"	T151 (prefix "P" if ALS) (see note below)
Type 1 Engine	"Engine 51"	E51 (prefix "B" if BLS)
Type 1 Engine / Temporarily Staffed Additional Engine	"Engine 151"	E151 (prefix "B" if BLS) (see note below)
Type 1 Engine/Permanently Staffed Additional Engine in one station	"Engine 251"	E251 (prefix "B" if BLS)
Type 3 Engine	"Engine 351"	E351 (prefix "B" if BLS)
Type 4 Engine	"Engine 451"	E451 (prefix "B" if BLS)
Type 5 Engine	"Engine 551"	E551 (prefix "B" if BLS)
Type 6 Engine	"Engine 651"	E651 (prefix "B" if BLS)
Type 1 Urban Search and Rescue	"USAR 151"	USR151
Type 2 Urban Search and Rescue	"USAR 251"	USR251
Type 3 Urban Search and Rescue	"USAR 351"	USR351
Utility	"Utility 51"	U51
Water Tender	"Water Tender 151"	WT151

NOTE: Reserve apparatus assume the call sign of the apparatus they are replacing. Breathing Supports, Engines, Lumber Truck, HazMat, Hose Tender, Repair, Rescue and Trucks will place a "1" in front of their call sign when they up-staff as a temporary second resource. All other units will utilize FIRESCOPE typing and place the appropriate type in front of their call sign. Some, but not all, examples are listed above.

eg. E151 becomes E52 when E52 is out of service for mechanical reasons

T151 becomes T152 when it's put in service at Station 52 to supplement T51 during high call volume

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Frequency Assignment & Usage Policy References:

1. California Fire Scope (2004), *Field Operations Guide ICS 420-1*
2. City of Phoenix (2005), *Phoenix Fire Department Radio System Safety Project, Technical Team Requirements Definition #27 Final Draft.*
3. San Mateo County Fire Chiefs Association (2006), *San Mateo County Fire Service Policies & Standards*
4. San Mateo County Fire Chiefs Association (2008), *Greater Alarm & Mutual Aid*