



TITLE

TALKGROUP MANAGEMENT

SCOPE

Provincial: Emergency Medical Services

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Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Clinical
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NOTE: The first appearance of terms in bold in the body of this document (except titles) are defined terms – please refer to the Definitions section.

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OBJECTIVES

- To identify the process for the utilization of side, working and significant event **Alberta First Responder Radio Communications System (AFRRCS)** talkgroups.
- To identify the process for the utilization of radio interoperability with public safety agencies.

PRINCIPLES

Talkgroups are utilized to enhance the flow of communications for specific situations while decreasing the volume of radio traffic on regular assigned talkgroups.

Once a talkgroup has been activated, all information shared from assigned resources to the **Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Dispatch, Communications and Deployment Centre** (hereafter EMS Dispatch Centre) must be done on the assigned talkgroup and not by telephone. This allows all assigned resources to receive the information in a timely manner.

The EMS Dispatch, Communications and Deployment Centre does not actively monitor **mutual aid** or **common event talkgroups**. Patient identifiers should not be transmitted over mutual aid and common event talkgroups as these channels are not encrypted.

APPLICABILITY

Compliance with this document is required by all Alberta Health Services employees, members of the medical and midwifery staffs, students, volunteers, and other persons acting on behalf of Alberta Health Services (including contracted service providers as necessary).

ELEMENTS

1. Side Talkgroup

- 1.1 A side talkgroup may be requested at any time by an **EMS crew** or a **Zone Operations Supervisor**. The side talkgroup shall be utilized to relay information of a sensitive nature or updates that require a lengthy explanation. Information of a sensitive nature includes but is not limited to, patient demographics or patient-specific information.
- 1.2 A request for a side talkgroup must be actioned using the following process:
 - a) The **Emergency Communications Officer (ECO)** responsible shall acknowledge the request and assign an encrypted tactical (TAC) talkgroup that must be verbally relayed to the requestor and entered into the remarks of the event.
 - b) The requesting EMS crew shall switch to the assigned TAC talkgroup and communicate with the ECO there.
 - c) The EMS crew shall advise the ECO when they are leaving the side talkgroup after their communications have been completed.

2. Working Talkgroup

- 2.1 A working talkgroup shall be requested through a Zone Operations Supervisor, **EMS Deployment Manager (DM)** or designate, however, an EMS crew may initiate this request based on the scale of the event. A working talkgroup is intended for event monitoring, collaboration and updates.
- 2.2 A request for a working talkgroup shall be referred to the on-duty DM or designate and appropriate Zone Operations Supervisor(s) without delay. Working talkgroups must be monitored by the geographically responsible dispatch centre.
- 2.3 A request for a "working talkgroup" must be managed by the ECO using the following process:
 - a) An EMS crew, DM or Zone Operations Supervisor requests a working talkgroup.
 - b) The ECO responsible must acknowledge the request and assign an encrypted "DISP" or "TAC" talkgroup.
 - c) The responding EMS crew(s) must switch to the assigned talkgroup and confirm with the ECO that they are on the assigned talkgroup utilizing their call sign.
 - d) The EMS crew(s) must advise the ECO when they are leaving the working talkgroup.

3. Significant Event Talkgroup

- 3.1 An operational request for a significant event talkgroup must be referred to the DM or designate or appropriate Zone Operations Supervisor(s) without delay and are designed to support large-scale provincial operations that require sustained support. Refer to the *EMS GV-DCD-010 Notification of Management of Significant Events*. Significant event talkgroups must be approved by a Zone Operations Supervisor and/or DM.
- 3.2 Significant event talkgroups are not encrypted and patient identifiers should not be communicated over unencrypted channels.
- 3.3 A significant event talkgroup must be initiated for events that require activation of one or more of the following:
- a) EMS Provincial Communications Centre (EMS PCC);
 - b) AHS Zone Emergency Operations Centre;
 - c) Tri Services Unified Command post;
 - d) AHS EMS Emergency Management Plan;
 - e) Unplanned Event (i.e., Mass Casualty Incident, Active Shooter, Plane Crash), where an unplanned significant event requires a significant event talkgroup and is expected to last greater than two (2) hours; and/or
 - f) Planned Event (i.e., Stampede Parade), where a planned significant event requires a significant event talkgroup.

4. Radio Interoperability with a Public Safety Agency: Mutual Aid and Common Event Talkgroups

- 4.1 AFRRCS radio interoperability for shared events is to ensure voice radio communication between EMS and external public safety agencies when responding to emergency medical events.
- 4.2 EMS interoperability talkgroups are not encrypted and are not actively monitored by AHS EMS Dispatch centre. Patient identifiers should not be communicated over unencrypted channels.
- 4.3 EMS Dispatch, acting as the EMS AFRRCS Agency Administrator, must facilitate the sharing of EMS mutual aid talkgroups with requesting AFRRCS-equipped Medical First Responder (MFR) agencies.
- 4.4 EMS **Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD)** must assign a mutual aid talkgroup for each event into the CAD remarks of the event. For example, Mutual Aid: FMCM Mutual Aid 11 will appear in the remarks.

- a) Local conditions in the Edmonton Zone exist where the working channel is provided in the remarks of the event for MFR-related responses. The channel is identified as a working channel **CHANNEL W1 ASSIGNED-multiple events in the EDMO FIRE Zone of the AFRRCS radio.
- 4.5 In all instances of radio interoperability with a Public Safety Agency, the EMS crew shall only assign one (1) AFRRCS portable radio to the event communication channel. The mutual aid channel must be monitored, as much as possible by the EMS crew, during the response and until the EMS crew clears the scene of the event, or the response is cancelled by AHS EMS Dispatch centre.
- 4.6 The second AFRRCS portable radio must remain on the EMS crew's active channel with the AHS EMS Dispatch centre.
- 4.7 Due to operational requirements or safety concerns, EMS crews may be required to change between various talkgroups during some events.
- 4.8 The EMS crew must advise MFR agencies when they are leaving the mutual aid channel.
- 4.9 MFR agencies that require a manual telephone call for notification must be notified of the mutual aid channel at the time of the call to request a MFR co-response.
- 4.10 EMS and law enforcement must use the AFRRCS assigned Common Event talkgroup (CET) for interoperability. It shall be the responsibility of the ECO to relay the assigned CET as required to the AHS EMS Dispatch centre.
- 4.11 User agencies that need to communicate with other user agencies not frequently contacted during special events or emergencies can use CETs. CETs are unrestricted and open to all AFRRCS agencies. The CET must be monitored, as much as possible by the EMS crew while assigned to the event. EMS Dispatchers are not expected to monitor activities on CETs.

5. Landing Zone

- 5.1 EMS crew or a Zone Operations Supervisor may be required to coordinate landing zone operations and must communicate on CET-PROV-SIMP-1.

DEFINITIONS

Alberta First Responder Radio Communications System (AFRRCS) means a two-way radio network for first responders in municipal, provincial and First Nations agencies across the province. The Alberta government is funding the network's construction, operation and maintenance, and it became operational on July 1, 2016.

Common event talkgroup means Alberta First Responder Radio Communications System (AFRRCS) owned, unencrypted talkgroups that are intended for all AFRRCS agencies to use

during large-scale events. These talkgroups are regional or provincial and should be available in all AFRRCS subscriber radios.

Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) means an Incident Management system that provides call-centre and communications centre operators with tools that they need to field calls, create and update incidents, and manage an organization's critical resources by providing real-time interaction of crucial data.

Emergency Communications Officer (ECO) means an officer who answers, call evaluates, and delivers emergency communications from a caller to the appropriate party following approved guidelines from AHS Medical Direction and International Academy of Emergency Medical Dispatch.

EMS crew means to refer to EMS staff; this may mean one or more persons, who are assigned to active duty and as part of their duty, are responsible to operate an ambulance / support vehicle.

EMS Deployment Manager means a leadership role within a dispatch centre that reports to a Communications Director.

EMS Dispatch, Communications and Deployment Centre means the EMS dispatch centres for AHS.

Mutual aid talkgroup means AHS EMS owned, unencrypted talkgroups that are shared with partner agencies to facilitate EMS and partner agency on-event communications.

Zone Operations Supervisor means a leadership role in EMS that reports directly to a Manager. This position is responsible and accountable for providing frontline direction and leadership towards the activities of EMS in support of the vision, mission and business plan of AHS. A Supervisor can be from either a direct delivery service or a contracted provider.

REFERENCES

- Alberta Health Services Resources:
 - *Alberta First Responder Radio Communication System*
 - *EMS All Hazards Incident Management Plan (2017)*
 - *EMS Emergency Management Plan (2013)*
 - *EMS GV DCD 010 Notification of Management of Significant Events*
- Non-Alberta Health Services Documents:
 - *Study Guide for the Restricted Operator Certificate With Aeronautical Qualification (ROC-A)*

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