



Adam Harrison, Fire Chief

***PURPOSE:***

Provide guidance to personnel in case of a communications emergency. Defined as a failure of one or multiple forms of communications to include but not limited to the County microwave radio system, cellular networks, radio, television, landlines, etc. These systems may be rendered inoperable by weather disasters, wildland fires, mechanical and/or technological system failures, software degradation, hackers, viruses, electromagnetic pulses, etc.

***OBJECTIVE:***

Outline procedures and resources to utilize in the occurrence of radio and/or cellular network systems failures.

***SCOPE:***

All Personnel

**PROCEDURE**

The emergency communications plan will aid should the County microwave radio system be completely or partially inoperable and/or other communications tools such as cellular networks.

There are several redundant systems in place to aid in communications should the system be inoperable for any reason.

Short term (12 hours or less) outages will be handled with the basic back-up systems in place.

The texting and the incident notification applications are two sources to notify companies/stations of an incident.

The alpha paging system also serves as a back-up form of incident notification for field personnel.

During times in which companies and/or stations are relying on these means of communications there should be someone on duty standing-by in the station's radio/watch room.

1. The member on watch shall always maintain a constant state of readiness while on watch. They will be responsible to ensure that any staff are aware of an incident.
2. A computer screen in the watch room shall be monitored for the status of the apparatus assigned to this station, active incidents, waiting calls, etc.

## ESCAMBIA COUNTY FIRE-RESCUE

*Standard Operating Guidelines*

**1000.045**

**Emergency Communications**

Implemented: 08/21/2023

Revised:

Page 2 of 5



Adam Harrison, Fire Chief

3. If mutual aid and/or strike team companies are assigned to the station, the member on watch will keep a log of that unit's response times and status.

The AVL system will also be utilized once a call is received the status changes will be updated utilizing this system (if the apparatus or vehicle is equipped).

The companies cell phone shall be a secondary source, if operational, for communications between the station, the company, and dispatch.

Companies equipped with AVL's may use the cell phone to transmit confidential information as well as a resource to receive pertinent but confidential information from dispatch.

Apparatus and vehicles not equipped with an AVL system will utilize a cell phone to communicate status changes with the dispatch center. If both the County microwave radio system and cellular networks are not available, the unit will maintain a logbook of response times and essential notes and report their status once they are back at the station.

Volunteer personnel may be directed to staff all volunteer stations (watch rooms) when residents are required to call fire stations directly or report to stations in person to report emergencies. Overtime staffing may be required to staff radio/watch rooms at career and combination stations.

Long term (greater than 12 hours) County-wide loss of radio communications system.

Long term and/or significant outages of the County radio system will initiate several back-up processes to be utilized.

The Counties portable emergency command center, THOR, maybe requested to set-up at the designated site to establish communications and maybe used in coordination with the communications center at Public Safety. THOR maybe established as a primary dispatch point or a relay center.

The Escambia County Sheriff's Office communications center also serves as a back-up site for the ECC. All 911 calls maybe diverted to the ECSO communications center as well.

The County may initiate the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) group to staff each fire station in the County and utilize amateur radio for communications between field units, fire stations, and dispatch.

Field units maybe able to utilize "talk around" TAC channels to communicate back to the nearest fire station or with other on-scene companies.



Adam Harrison, Fire Chief

The texting and the incident app are two sources to notify companies/stations of an incident if they remain functional.

During times in which companies and/or stations are relying on these means of communications there shall be someone on duty standing-by in the station's radio/watch room.

1. The member on watch shall always maintain a constant state of readiness while on watch. They will be responsible to ensure that any staff are aware of an incident.
2. A computer screen in the watch room shall be monitored for the status of the apparatus assigned to this station, active incidents, waiting calls, etc.
3. If mutual aid and/or strike team companies are assigned to the station, the member on watch will keep a log of that unit's response times and status.

The AVL system will also be utilized once a call is received the status changes will be updated utilizing this system (if the apparatus or vehicle is equipped).

The companies cell phone shall be a secondary source, if operational, for communications between the station, the company, and dispatch.

If field personnel are unable to communicate back to the fire station or dispatch, company officers will keep a log of incident times and basic notes. The log shall contain the address or location of the incident, nature of the call, date, and any pertinent information related to the incident.

Depending on the status of the 911 system it may be necessary to have local media notify residents to call the fire station directly. If all telephonic communications are inoperable, residents will be required to directly report emergencies to their nearest fire station.

Volunteer personnel may be directed to staff all volunteer stations (watch rooms) when residents are required to call fire stations directly or report to stations in person to report emergencies. Overtime staffing may be required to staff radio/watch rooms at career and combination stations.

During long-term outages coordination will take place with Emergency Management and communications to request additional resources such as COWs (Cell-On-Wheels or Cell-On-Wings) and other temporary infrastructure.



Adam Harrison, Fire Chief

If multiple forms of communications are inoperable especially those utilized to communicate with citizens (television, radio, cellular) it may be necessary to utilize volunteer staffing from other organizations such as ESAR, BRACE, CERT, etc. to disseminate information by flyers at intersections, door-to-door, or through community meetings at community centers, churches, etc.

The **Alert Escambia Emergency Notification** (Everbridge) maybe utilized as a form of communications for emergency personnel and to communicate messages to citizens.

**Emergency Alert System (EAS)** The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the FCC, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Weather Service (NWS) work collaboratively to maintain the EAS and [Wireless Emergency Alerts](#), which are the two main components of the national public warning system and enable authorities at all levels of government to send urgent emergency information to the public.

Satellite phones maybe necessary to acquire during long-term communications emergencies. Satellite phones will be coordinated with the local Emergency Management office.

Additional information can be found at the following link for the National Emergency Communications Plan.

[https://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/national\\_emergency\\_communications\\_plan.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/national_emergency_communications_plan.pdf)

### **Radio/Watch Room**

Each station has an area designated as the radio/watch room. At a minimum, the following supplies shall be maintained in case of a communications emergency in which all or a portion of the Counties communications systems are deemed inoperable. These areas shall be maintained so that personnel can utilize them immediately if the need arises.

1. Mobile VHF base station.
2. Mobile UHF base station.
3. Desktop or laptop computer.
4. Blank logbook for specific incident entries.
5. Blank writing tablets for notes
6. Pens and pencils
7. Escambia County map book
8. First due area grid map
9. Phone list with pertinent numbers
10. Cell phone charger
11. Wireless weather radio

## ESCAMBIA COUNTY FIRE-RESCUE

*Standard Operating Guidelines*

**1000.045**

**Emergency Communications**

Implemented: 08/21/2023

Revised:

Page 5 of 5



Adam Harrison, Fire Chief

### **Additional Resources**

Additional resources that may be utilized during short- or long-term periods to enhance communications and/or serve as part of a relay network.

1. Portable high-rise kit
2. Fire stations equipped with tower sites.
3. Manpower from other agencies such as but not limited to ESAR, BRACE, CERT
4. Satellite phones
5. Liaison for EM