

Allied Radio Matrix for Emergency Response (ARMER) Standards, Protocols, Procedures

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Procedure Title:	Southwest Interoperable Plain Language Policy	
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1. Purpose or Objective:

Plain Language (Clear Text), Compatibility:

The ability of emergency management/response personnel from different disciplines, jurisdictions, organizations and agencies to work together depends greatly on their ability to communicate with each other. The use of plain language is about the ability of emergency management/response personnel to communicate clearly with one another and effectively coordinate activities, no matter what the size, scope, location, or complexity of the incident.

The use of plain language (clear text) in emergency management and incident response is a matter of public safety, especially the safety of emergency management/response personnel and those affected by the incident. It is critical that all those involved with an incident know and utilize commonly established operational structures, terminology, policies, and procedures. This will facilitate the achievement of interoperability across agencies/organizations, jurisdictions, and disciplines, which is exactly what NIMS and the Incident Command System (ICS) is seeking to achieve.

2. Technical Background:

Integrated Communications:

Incident communications are facilitated through the development and use of a common communications plan and interoperable communications processes and architectures. The ICS 205 Form is available to assist in developing a common communications plan. This integrated approach links the operational and support units of the various agencies involved, and is necessary to maintain communications connectivity and discipline and enable common situational awareness and interaction. Preparedness planning should address the equipment, systems, and protocols necessary to achieve integrated voice and data incident management communications.

3. Operational Context:

All communications, whether oral or written, between organizational elements during an incident should be in plain language in order to ensure that information dissemination is timely, clear, acknowledged, and understood by all intended recipients. Codes should not be used, and all communications should be confined to essential messages. The use of acronyms should be avoided during incidents requiring the participation of multiple agencies or organizations. Policies and procedures that foster compatibility should be defined to allow information sharing among all emergency management/response personnel and their affiliated organizations to the greatest extent possible.

Encryption or Tactical Language:

When necessary, emergency management/response personnel and their affiliated organizations need to have a methodology and the systems in place to encrypt information so that security can be maintained. Although plain language may be appropriate during response to most incidents, tactical language is occasionally warranted due to the nature of the incident (e.g., during an ongoing terrorist event). The use of specialized encryption and tactical language should be incorporated into any comprehensive incident action plan (IAP) or incident management communications plan.

The principal objection to the use of plain language by Law Enforcement is the possibility that sensitive information could be revealed to a suspect within hearing range of the responder, possibly endangering the safety of the responder. To address these concerns on a multi-agency response, tactical codes should be recognized and be a part of the IAP and incident communications plan to maintain responder safety. Examples may include the following:

- Immediate danger
- Backup/assistance
- Take subject into custody
- Hold for sensitive information

4. Standardized Policy

The use of plain language is about the ability of area commanders, state and local EOC personnel, federal operational coordinators, and responders to communicate clearly with each other and effectively coordinate response activities, no matter what the size, scope or complexity of the incident. The ability of responders from different jurisdictions and different disciplines to work together depends greatly on their ability to communicate with each other.

It is required that plain language be used for multi-agency, multi-jurisdiction and multi-discipline events, such as major disasters and exercises. Beginning in the fiscal year that starts on Oct. 1, 2006, federal preparedness grant funding is contingent on the use of plain language in incidents requiring assistance from responders from other agencies, jurisdictions and functional disciplines.

Primary Intended Use

For any multi-agency or multi-jurisdictional emergency response or exercise.

Best Practices Encouraged

The use of plain language in emergency response is matter of public safety, especially the safety of first responders and those affected by the incident. It is critical that all local responders, as well as those coming into the impacted area from other jurisdictions and other states as well as the federal government, know and utilize commonly established operational structures, terminology, policies and procedures.

Incident Scope and Geographic Area

The shared statewide incident response talkgroups are available for use in incidents anywhere the ARMER system provides geographic coverage regardless of incident size or scale. Interoperability incidents may be localized or dispersed in area. Participating incident personnel and resources may be localized, regional, statewide or national. Incidents may be pre-planned or emergent in nature.

Implementation Deadline (insert date)

5. Standardized Procedure:

While the NIMS Integration Center doesn't require plain language for internal operations, it is strongly encouraged. It is important to practice everyday terminology and procedures that will need to be used in emergency incidents and disasters. NIMS implementation is a long-term effort. Though it is not practical to expect a change of ingrained habits overnight, it is expected that over time, everyone will understand the importance of using plain language for day to day operations.

Unit Identification

When operating on the shared statewide incident response talkgroups, users should initially identify in the following manner using plain language: Agency name, followed by service branch or function designation, followed by call sign or unit number. Examples: "North EMS 512", "Elk River Police 512", "Washington County Public Works 512", "State Patrol 512", etc. Once established, ongoing communications between the same units may be shortened.

Use of 10-Codes and Acronyms

The use of 10-codes, signals, unique acronyms, and other codes should not be used on the statewide incident response talkgroups because there is no standardized set of codes. Plain language should be used in all cases.

6. Management

Violations (Non compliance)

A violation or non compliance to the Statewide Interoperable Plain Language Policy should be documented and sent to the Regional Radio Board (RRB) for review and if deemed necessary by the RRB for follow up by the local System Administrator where the non compliant entity is located.

The local System Administrator will report back their findings to the RRB. This may be done in person at a RRB meeting or via letter to the RRB Chair.

Repeated violations by any one entity will require a representative of that entity to appear before the Regional Radio Board where the Board will determine the appropriate action to be taken.

Variations and Exceptions

Encryption or Tactical Language