

COMMUNICATIONS

Class Objective: The objective of this class is to teach CERT teams to effectively communicate during emergencies.

The greatest difficulty at a large incident is communication.

Effective Communication Methods

- Radios
- Runners

Radios

Ham Radios – Require a special license. Can be used to communicate within the neighborhood, city, region, state or worldwide. Can be used to talk to City Ham Radio organization. Typically used provide communications support to shelters, aid stations, etc. as cellular and public service radio systems cannot handle and are not suitable for some types of necessary communications.

FRS (Family Radio Service) Radios – Available to anyone. Can be used to communicate within the neighborhood. May have the ability to talk to surrounding neighborhoods.

- **Set the radios to a common channel** - Each person needs to confirm the channel used for the emergency before leaving for their posts and also check the operation of the radio by transmitting to test it.
- **Keep radio communication to a minimum** - If the person you need to talk to is close by, communicate face to face.

Effective Messages

- **Keep it Simple** - the more complex a message, the more likely it will be misunderstood.

Example: "This is Mike, Search & Rescue team leader. We are at the building at 123 Main St. where the emergency involving possible people hurt inside the house that was just reported is being taken care of by my team. We have commenced operations by locating our triage tags in our trauma bags and have begun triaging and moving the victims."

Could be shortened to: "Command Post, this is the Search & Rescue team leader. My team is on scene at 123 Main St. We are setting up triage. Over."

If the Command Post needs more information, they will ask.

- **Use Plain English** – Most emergency responders have changed from using codes to “clear text” (plain English) to avoid misunderstandings.
- **Listen before talking. Be sure no one else is talking before you begin. After depressing the talk button wait for a second before speaking.**
- **Pause before ending. Hold in the “talk” button for a second after you finish speaking so your last word is not cut off.**

Each message should contain information in the following order:

1. Title of Receiver - "example: Command Post"
2. Title of Sender - “example: S&R Team Leader”
3. If you have *Emergency Traffic*, it should be indicated in initial broadcast.
4. *Wait for Receiver to acknowledge you. Do not continue the transmission until you are sure the Receiver is ready to receive.*
5. Location
6. Message
7. Termination – “Over” (“over” is the universal term for ending a transmission. Others will know that the air is clear for their transmission.)
8. Receiver will acknowledge receipt. Receiver may choose to repeat the message to confirm it was correctly understood.

Example:

“Command Post, this is S&R Team leader with Emergency Traffic”

“S&R Team leader, this is Command Post, go ahead”

“Command Post, S&R Team is on scene at 123 Main St. We need the First Aid Team for injuries.”

“Command Post copies, need the First Aid Team to 123 Main St. Over”

Runners

- **One message only** - At a complex scene with distractions, more information will invariably get lost.
- **Keep focused** - Your primary goal is to support the operation by conveying messages. Don't be distracted by trying to help others with rescue/response activities.

Communication During Search & Rescue Activities

COMMUNICATION PLAN

Before sending a search team into a building, set up a communication plan so all team members know what they are expected to do. Issues to discuss include:

- Emergency recall (in case the safety officer detects a hazardous condition that could endanger the search team)
- Status check (to confirm the team is OK and let them know how much time has elapsed*)
- Recall procedure (for rest or to send in fresh people)

Using Whistles to Communicate

Emergency Recall

- Three *short* blows by safety officer means the search team needs to exit right away. Search team acknowledges by blowing 1 time.
- Three *short* blows by the search team means they are in trouble and request help.

Status Check

- Two *short* blows by the safety officer means that one half of the predetermined search time has elapsed. Search team acknowledges by blowing the whistle once.

Recall Procedure

- Two *long* blows means the search time has expired and the search team should exit the building. Search team acknowledges with one blow (about 20 min)

Using Voice or Radio to Communicate

- Use clear text and keep messages brief. Refer to radio communication procedures above.

**Search times should be between 10 and 30 minutes, depending upon the situation...shorter time periods for more stressful/hazardous situations.*

What about telephones?

Cell phones certainly, and hard-wired phones possibly may be the least reliable means of communicating during an emergency. A back up plan should always be in place.