



Communications



CHIEF GUFFEY COMMUNICATING FACE-TO-FACE WITH CREWS ON A 4 ALARM FIRE

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges on the fireground is communications, whether it's face-to-face or radio. It requires repetition, experience, and practice to effectively convey your message clearly in as few words as possible. On the radio, MDFR talks more than other fire departments and has less radio silence because we do not rely upon pre-assigned SOP's. This fact alone makes it very difficult for crews to get airtime since the IC is responsible for assigning every task on the fire ground. If crews are dealing with an overzealous IC, they may have to wait minutes to convey their message. It is crucial for all of MDFR to recognize the importance of radio silence, as it allows for necessary radio traffic.

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MIAMI-DADE FIRE RESCUE

SEARCH & RESCUE MANUAL



When discussing search and rescue and the language used by the crew during a search, keeping the communication brief and clear is essential. Circular talk or closed loop communications ensures accountability, and repeating what was spoken is the 'lock' that ensures accountability. We employ this practice on the radio and face-to-face, but it becomes even more vital when operating in zero visibility during a search.

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Interior Communications

Communicating with a crew inside a structure is extremely difficult. The noise of the fire, the engine running outside, the radio traffic, and the voices of other firefighters all make communications inside with your own crew extremely difficult. Add the sound of your own regulator and zero visibility, and the challenge of keeping constant communications with your crew can be a daunting proposition. But it can and must be done.

Accountability, speed, and efficiency between your crew members relies heavily on the closed loop communications model that has been discussed extensively throughout this manual. Simply put, accountability requires that you *always* maintain voice distance between you and your crew. Search crews have often been caught off guard when transitioning from a visible interior to sudden zero visibility due to changing conditions. If an OIC has let a crew stray too far from their side, when conditions change, they won't be able to gather them back in to regroup and reorient.

Fire is constantly changing; it is foolish to not expect conditions to change while you're searching. Always expect and be prepared for worsening conditions before improvement.

Closed-loop communications are always necessary. The sender needs to confirm the message because they can't rely on facial expressions, a nod of the head, or even visual confirmation that they are actually following the message or order. Furthermore, the words the sender uses to convey their message are very important, as well as keeping the message concise. As the search is underway, the OIC should be communicating often and should 'call out' nearly everything. Here is a brief closed-loop conversation between an OIC and crew as they approach a bedroom threshold:

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“Scanning a new room.”

“Scanning!”

“John, search this room. I’ll anchor the door.”

“Searching.”

“Mark, stay at my hip. You’re up next.”

“At your hip.”

As the OIC monitors the search with the TIC, they can call out objects to help John.

“John, bunkbed up ahead. Get the top.”

“Bunk bed ahead.”

“Window on wall 3.”

“Window.”

The closed-loop communication keeps going that way until exiting the structure. The OIC must keep talking. In this case, the more the OIC talks, the more they direct and guide, the more confident the searchers will be as they push forward. Remember officers, you may be able to see them with the TIC, but they can’t see. You are responsible for painting a picture for them in as few words as possible.

Here are some tips to make communicating with your crew easier:

- Firefighters should have their radio on, but the volume should be turned all the way down. If you are in voice contact range, you will also hear the OIC’s radio and a bulk of the transmissions.
- When an OIC stops to scan, the firefighters should ride the OIC’s hip. This will give the firefighter a chance to ‘see’ what the officer is seeing by scanning with them over their shoulder.
- Try to keep all callouts brief, no longer than what can be said in one breath. A search is strenuous. Talking and trying to keep your breathing slow is a practiced skill. It is aided by short communications that don’t require a breath in the middle.
- The ‘call back’ that closes the loop of communications often does not need to be longer than a word or two relaying that the receiver understood the message. “Bunk bed ahead!”

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Radio Communications

In terms of radio communication with the IC during standard search and rescue operations, there is very little need for communications other than the required benchmarks. When a crew is assigned Primary Search on a residential house fire, there isn't a need to communicate after acknowledgement until the primary is complete unless the crew encounters something *worth* communicating. Here are some examples of relevant and important updates/requests:

- The crew has found a victim.
- The crew has encountered hoarder conditions.
- The presence of efficiencies or multiple dwellings.
- The search crew has located the fire ahead of the hose crew. In this case, they should isolate the fire if possible, and radio the location so the hose crew can easily find it.
- Unusual hazards that could endanger other crews.
- A more advanced fire than what was anticipated on the exterior.
- Necessary focused ventilation. Before calling for ventilation, consider the flow path and where the ventilation will draw the fire. Understand that a



LT. CRUZ ON THE RADIO AT A 4TH ALARM AUTO REPAIR SHOP FIRE

- search crew requesting ventilation is unusual and should be done only in extreme circumstances. The hose crew, who generally will know where the fire is will be better suited for requesting ventilation in most cases.
- 'Breaking glass' particularly if the search crew is working above grade. Just recently a crew broke glass at an apartment fire in North Miami without radioing and injured firefighters below them.
- When entering and exiting the building with a par.
- When the OIC and crew are unable to complete a search. They should include the 'why' and what part of the building is left to search.

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On a search of a single-family home, the IC assumes and often can see *when and where* you are starting your search. When the structure is larger than a single-family home or your ingress point is outside the expected norms, the search crew should always radio when and where they are starting their search. “R-7 to Command be advised we are on rope, making entrance at the Bravo showroom door.” The IC will acknowledge and be able to track your ‘time on air’ and know your ingress point. Both of these things are vital to accountability.

In larger homes, particularly two-story homes, the search crew should advise the IC when they’ve changed floors during their search. This updates the crew’s ‘last known location’ if they encounter a problem later.

“R-52. Primary of the first floor is complete. We’re moving to the second floor.”

“R-52, I understand primary of the first floor is complete. Now searching the second floor.”

These quick updates not only increase safety but allow the IC to roughly know the crews current location as well as anticipate any needs they might have if they find a victim on the second floor or encounter a problem.

We have a victim!

Upon finding a victim, the OIC must radio the IC immediately and advise the plan and probable egress point. You *must* give the IC time to get a crew to you. A hallmark of good firefighting is anticipating your next move and planning ahead. If you’re going to need help, ask for it early.

“R-7, Priority.”

“R-7, go ahead.”

“R-7, we have a victim. We are going to the front door.”

“R-7, I understand you are taking the victim to the front door. I’m going to get you a unit to the front door.”

“R-20 prepare to accept the victim at the door.”

Concise, radio communications takes practice. Firefighters should always listen to their fires and analyze how they could communicate a message better. A perfect message is clear, to the point and short.

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