



# ACTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

DEPARTMENT MANUAL; P&P: Operations		
POLICY & PROCEDURE # 1.20	DATE OF ISSUE: 1/26/2024	EFFECTIVE DATE: 2/9/2024
SUBJECT: COMMUNICATIONS	ISSUING AUTHORITY: Chief James Cogan	
REFERENCE(S): Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission # 81.1.2; 81.2.3; 81.2.4; 81.2.5; 81.2.6; 81.2.8; 81.2.12; 81.2.14; 81.3.1; 81.3.2	<input type="checkbox"/> NEW <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AMENDS <input type="checkbox"/> RESCINDS	

## I. PURPOSE

The Communications Center is responsible for all police communications within the town of Acton. The essential function of the communications system is to satisfy the immediate police service needs of the community, both during routine operations and during times of emergency. The speed and accuracy with which information is processed are measures of the Department's capability to respond to the needs of the community.

## II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Acton Police Department to have 24-hour two-way radio capabilities providing continuous communication between field personnel and the Communications Center. Radios are required to enable officers to maintain communications for exchanging information, requesting assistance, receiving orders or instructions, and responding to calls for service. When necessary the Communications Center and field personnel do have the capability to communicate with neighboring agencies. **[81.2.4]**

## III. FCC REGULATIONS **[81.1.2]**

All Acton Police Department communications shall be in accordance with Federal Communications (FCC) procedures, requirements, and regulations. Employees are directed to the following FCC website for access to these rules and regulations. FCC Rules and Regulations can be found at: [https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title47/47tab\\_02.tpl](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title47/47tab_02.tpl)

## IV. DISPATCHER FUNCTIONS

- A. When using any communications equipment, Dispatchers shall at all times, conduct themselves in a professional and respectful manner. The primary functions of a dispatcher assigned to the Communications Center are:

1. Receive, screen, and prioritize calls for information or services. Judging the characteristics of the call to determine whether an emergency or non-emergency response is required. Ensure that appropriate public safety resources are directed to all situations requiring police, fire, or medical attention. Ensure that additional public or private agency resources are utilized as necessary and appropriate to specific situations. **[81.2.6(2A)]**
2. Support mobile units in the field with information obtained through the various components of the communications system.
3. Provide Emergency Medical Dispatch over Next Generation 911 (NG 911), the phone or radio within their scope of training.
4. Obtain and record required information for all requests, including those received by telephone, in person, self-initiated by officers, reported to officers in the field, etc.
5. The Acton Communications Center does not monitor alarms. However, officers shall be dispatched to respond to alarms that are reported (calls for service). See Department Policy 1.03 Response to Calls for further information. **[81.2.13(1A)]**

## B. Response Procedures

1. It shall be the responsibility of the Dispatcher to obtain information from the caller, which will determine the severity and thus govern the degree of response. Every effort shall be made to obtain the verifiable identity of each caller (especially witnesses, complainants, and/or victims) to aid in the investigation and prosecution of incidents.
2. The Dispatchers shall adhere to the training standards as stipulated in 560 CMR.
3. Dispatchers shall accept all misdirected calls and promptly relay information to the agency having jurisdiction. Dispatchers shall inform the caller that they will be referred to another agency. **[81.2.6(2B)] [81.2.12]**
4. Dispatchers are authorized to provide Emergency Medical Dispatch instruction within the scope of their training.
5. The Dispatcher will determine which officer(s) should be assigned to a call based on location and availability and shall pass all relevant information to the responding officer(s) clearly, carefully, and correctly.
6. The criteria for determining the number of officers to be assigned in response to an incident shall be based on the totality of information received by the Dispatcher.
7. Dispatchers shall avoid giving callers estimates of response time. Dispatchers should only inform the caller of the Department's response. **[81.2.6(2B)]**
8. Based on the seriousness of the incident the dispatcher shall promptly notify the Patrol Shift Supervisor.

Examples of such incidents include but are not limited to the following:

- A shooting or stabbing

- Domestic violence incident
- Bank or armed robberies in progress
- Armed subject with a gun or other deadly weapon
- A bombing, explosion, major fire, or building collapse
- Hostage situations

9. The dispatcher shall also promptly notify the Patrol Shift Supervisor of the following reported incidents:

- a. Traffic accidents involving a police officer and/or patrol vehicle.
- b. Domestic violence involving a police officer.
- c. Incidents in which a police officer is a participant.

10. Other situations as deemed necessary by the Dispatcher, subject to the seriousness of the incident and the availability of the Patrol Shift Supervisor.

### **C. Monitoring Officer Status**

1. Officer's personal identification numbers or cruiser assignment numbers shall be used for identifying officers during radio transmissions. A list of officers' personal identification numbers and cruiser assignment numbers shall be made readily available to Dispatchers. **[81.2.4(C)]**
2. The Dispatcher should elicit as much information as possible to enhance the safety of the officer and assist in anticipating conditions to be encountered at the scene.
3. The following information, at a minimum, should be entered in the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) System:
  - a. Incident / Control number; **[81.2.3(a)]**
  - b. Date of request; **[81.2.3(b)]**
  - c. Time of request; **[81.2.3(c)]**
  - d. Name and address of the complainant, if possible; **[81.2.3(d)]**
  - e. Type of incident reported; **[81.2.3(e)]**
  - f. Location of incident reported; **[81.2.3(f)]**
  - g. Identification of officer(s) assigned as primary; **[81.2.3(g)]**
  - h. Identification of officer(s) assigned as back-up; **[81.2.3(h)]**
  - i. Time of dispatch; **[81.2.3(i)]**
  - j. Time of officer arrival; **[81.2.3(j)]**
  - k. Time of officer return to service; **[81.2.3(k)]** and
  - l. Disposition or status of the reported incident. **[81.2.3(l)]**

4. The Dispatcher shall record the change in status (assigned, arrived, cleared, or out of service) as each officer is assigned to a Request for Service or self-initiated activity. Each of the previously mentioned status designations will be recorded by the computer as to the exact time the call is received when the officer is assigned the call, when he/she arrived, and what time he/she cleared. [81.2.3] [81.2.4(B)]  
[81.2.5 (E)]
5. Officers shall notify the Communications Center on all self-initiated activity to include [81.2.4(A)]:
  - a. Request for Service;
  - b. Service of paperwork (restraining orders, harassment prevention orders, warrants, court summons, etc.)
  - c. Motor vehicle stops; and
  - d. Out of Service. [81.2.4(B)]

#### **D. Medical Instruction Over the Phone**

1. All dispatchers must be certified to provide Emergency Medical Dispatching (EMD) over the phone. [81.2.14(1A)]
2. Upon receiving a request for emergency medical instruction either by phone or by radio, the dispatcher(s) shall first inquire if an ambulance is needed, and dispatch the appropriate emergency response.
3. Dispatchers should then provide emergency medical instructions by phone using approved emergency medical guidelines and materials. All dispatchers will have immediate access to these materials. [81.2.14(1D)]

### **V. COMMUNICATIONS SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Dispatch Supervisor shall be responsible for:

- A. Ensure the proper functioning of the Communications System and to ensure that communications operations are conducted according to proper procedures.
- B. Oversee all Police Communications Center equipment and conduct periodic inspections of said equipment to ensure that it is in good working order.

### **VI. LOGGING / RECORDING OF VOICE COMMUNICATIONS**

- A. It shall be the policy of the Department to record all voice communications from emergency and non-emergency telephone lines and radio equipment that originate or

are received in the Communications Center. Calls transferred from the Communications Center within the police facility are not recorded. The purpose of recording such communications is to:

1. Provide a means to verify information received by telephone or radio;
2. Better provide for officer safety;
3. Ensure the integrity of the Department and its employees;
4. Enable the Department to respond to questions regarding the content of voice communications;
5. Promote professionalism in the use of the Department's voice communication systems; and
6. Reduce Department, town, and employee potential for civil liability.

#### **B. Recording Procedures**

1. Handling and Storage of Recordings: All radio transmissions and phone calls are captured within the Equature system. The system is maintained solely by the Massachusetts State 9-1-1 Department. The equipment is located in the Communications Equipment room in the Communications Center and is secured by a locked door with access by authorized IT personnel. The phone and radio recordings are accessible on the computer hard drives of Department supervisors and the Court Prosecutor; and are password protected. **[81.2.8(5A)]**
2. Retention of Records: Phone and radio recordings will be maintained for a minimum of one (1) year provided no litigation is pending. Records for 9-1-1 call information shall be retained for a period of three (3) years provided no litigation is pending. Requests by the public to transcribe or copy the recordings shall be made in writing to the Records Department. **[81.2.8(4A)(4B)]**
3. Reviewing Recorded Conversations: Dispatchers will be allowed to monitor calls and radio transmissions while it is being answered and/or have access to immediate playback capability for a previously recorded call or radio transmission for up to four (4) hours. **[81.2.8(8A)]**
4. Malfunctions: Should a malfunction occur with the NG9-1-1 equipment, the Dispatcher shall immediately contact the General Dynamic's Help Desk. The Dispatcher shall record such malfunction including the date, time, and action taken in the daily log.

### **VII. AUTHORIZATION TO REVIEW RECORDED CONVERSATIONS**

- A. Only the Dispatch Supervisor, Court Prosecutor, and authorized officers with the rank of Sergeant and above shall have the authority to review telephone or radio transmissions. Such review shall be for training, investigation, court or internal affairs purposes only. **[81.2.8(6A)]**

- B. The Dispatch Supervisor, Court Prosecutor, and Department personnel with the rank of Lieutenant or above shall have the authority to obtain copies of calls requested by the District Attorney's office or the Court.
- C. Exceptional requests (outside agencies, legal inquiries, etc.) shall be referred to the Records Department for authority to review the call in question.

## **VIII. ACCESS TO DEPARTMENTAL RESOURCES**

- A. Communications personnel shall have a map detailing the Department's service area visibly available at all times. In addition to the map identifying city jurisdictional boundaries and beat/reporting area designations, specific detailed maps/plans of areas and complexes shall be maintained by the Dispatch Supervisor as necessary to ensure proper emergency vehicle response by both police and fire personnel. **[81.2.5 (A)]**
- B. A duty roster of all department personnel shall be provided to be immediately available to communication personnel. **[81.2.5(B)]**
- C. Communication personnel shall have immediate access to all personal home and/or cell telephone numbers of all personnel. **[81.2.5 (C)]**
- D. Communication personnel shall have immediate radio or telephone access to officers and the Patrol Shift Supervisor. **[81.2.5 (D)]**
- E. The Department's Dispatch Emergency and Tactical Plans are located in the Dispatcher's manual (a copy is located in the Communications area). Also, Policy 7.02 All Hazards Plan & Training is available on the in-house computer system, and hardcopy manual. **[81.2.5 (G)]**

## **IX. OUTSIDE SERVICES AND RESOURCES**

The Communications Supervisor shall be responsible for maintaining an updated list of telephone numbers for external services (such as those pertaining to fire, rescue, and ambulance) to be readily available to Communications personnel. **[81.2.5(F)]**

- A. Personnel requiring the utilization of outside resources shall obtain approval for the use of such services from the shift supervisor.
- B. Communication with Interacting Agencies **[81.2.4(D)]**:

In the event that Department members need to communicate with interacting agencies, officers may utilize other agencies' radio frequencies that are pre-programmed into portable and cruiser radios. If an officer is unable to locate a pre-programmed frequency for a specific agency, this Department's communications center will communicate directly with the interacting agencies' communication centers to relay crucial information and maintain radio communication.

## **X. DELIVERY OF MESSAGES**

- A. Only those messages of an emergency nature shall be delivered by members of this department. Emergency situations shall be defined as follows:
  - 1. Notification of serious or life-threatening injuries or illness.
  - 2. Notification of death or serious family circumstances.
  - 3. Other messages of an emergency nature as authorized by the Patrol Shift Supervisor.
- B. Communication personnel shall make every effort (extension page, building page, or radio) to contact the officer on duty to advise he/she has a phone call on hold. If the officer is not available then the caller shall be advised that the officer is not available, and the caller shall be forwarded to the officer's voicemail.
- C. Communication personnel shall not utilize the Department's paging system for non-police business.

## **XI. AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL**

- A. Only Department personnel and town employees with authorized card key access shall be allowed in the Communications Center unless authorized by the Chief of Police or their designee. All visitors shall be monitored by a Dispatcher. **[81.3.1]**

## **XII. ALTERNATIVE POWER SOURCE (GENERATOR)**

In the event of a power failure, a generator services the Department with alternative power. The alternative power source (generator) is sufficient to ensure the continued operation of the department's emergency communications equipment.

- A. Monitoring: The on-duty Dispatchers shall monitor the generator panel located in the Communications Center. Should a warning light be activated indicating trouble with the generator the Dispatchers shall promptly notify the Patrol Shift Supervisor, Communications Supervisor, and the building maintenance supervisor for the town.
- B. Monthly testing: The Deputy Chief or his/her designee shall be responsible to inspect and test the generator at least monthly or in conformance with the manufacturer's recommendations. This is to ensure the continued operation of the department's emergency communications equipment in the event of a power failure. The Deputy Chief shall be responsible for addressing any malfunctions. A record of the generator's self-tests is maintained within the generator control panel. The Deputy Chief or his/her designee shall document the monthly generator test within the records management system. **[81.3.2(2A)]**
- C. Yearly Evaluation and Testing: The Deputy Chief or his designee shall be responsible for working with the Municipal Properties Department and scheduling to evaluate and test or operate the generator under full load, at least once a year to confirm it is in good working order. The Deputy Chief shall be responsible for addressing any malfunctions.

The Deputy Chief or his/her designee shall document the yearly generator test within the Accreditation records folders. **[81.3.2(2B)(7)]**

D. Power failures: Whenever there is an interruption in power to the PSF and the generator is operated under full load the Dispatchers should create an entry in the records management system documenting the power outage. **[81.3.2(7)]**

## **COMMUNICATIONS INFORMATION**

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**History: Manual I, Section III.**