

San Francisco Fire Department

Division of Training

Training Bulletin 22-01



Radio Direct Tactical Channel Use on Fire Ground

March 2022

Radio Direct Tactical Channel use at Fire Suppression Incidents

Purpose

To improve fireground radio communications, especially when firefighters are working in an IDLH atmosphere and using a SCBA.

Background

Since the conversion to the new digital trunked radio system, clear fire ground radio transmissions have been difficult to achieve. Direct Tactical Channels provide improved Fire Ground Radio Communications.

In a study of over 200 working fires in 2021, a Chief Officer arrived on-scene on average within 1-2 minutes of the first arriving engine or truck.

Synopsis

The intent of this policy is to transfer all fire ground communications to Direct Tactical Channels. The Department recognizes the need for responding Chief Officers to be able to communicate with units on-scene prior to their arrival. Therefore, Company Officers will initially use the Trunked Tactical Channel to communicate with the responding Chiefs and will switch to the Direct Tactical Channel upon the arrival of a Chief Officer OR when donning a SCBA mask.

Direct Channel Policy:

When to use Direct Tactical Channels

Dispatch will not specify if the Tactical Channel is Direct or on the Trunked system. Responding Companies and Chief Officers shall use the following guidelines regarding Trunked vs Direct Tactical Channels.

Companies shall use DIRECT Tactical Channels located in the “C” zone (TAC 7D – TAC 16D) when responding to all alarm investigations, Smoke in the Building and Fire in the Building incidents.

Exceptions to Direct Channel use.

- BART—BART radio traffic shall continue to use BART PRIMARY, BART SECONDARY AND BART COMMAND
- MUNI UNDERGROUND -- MUNI underground calls shall remain on the trunked Tactical Channels located in the “A” zone (TAC 7–TAC 16). MUNI tunnels have an underground antenna that connects to the trunked radio system.
- OUTDOOR NON-IDLH incidents. Grass fires, Rescue calls (Bay, Surf, Medical etc.)
- As determined by the Incident Commander.

Firefighters

Firefighters will have their radios tuned to the DIRECT (C bank) channels unless directed to do otherwise.

Company Officers

- Prior to a Chief Officers arrival on-scene, Company Officers will communicate with the responding Battalion Chief on the "A" zone (TAC 7–TAC 16 Trunked).
- During the initial stages of an incident and prior to donning their SCBA mask, Company Officers shall update responding Chiefs on the "A" zone (TAC 7 – TAC 16 Trunked), they should switch to the Direct Tactical Channel after arrival of a Chief officer OR when donning a SCBA mask. All further communications will occur on the Direct Tactical Channels.

Chief Officers

- Battalion Chiefs shall carry 2 portable radios.
 - One portable radio will be set to the Trunked Tactical Channel, this shall be used for communications with the responding Division Chief, or other responding companies
 - The 2nd portable radio shall be set to the Direct Tactical Channel, used for fire ground communications.
- Upon arrival at an alarm investigation, SIB or FIB, the BC shall give the responding Division Chief an initial report on the Trunked Tactical Channel with the initial actions and company locations. The BC shall then ensure that the incident transitions to Direct Tactical Channels

Example:

Transmitted on the Trunked tactical channel:

"B07 is on-scene, we have a 3-story type 5 residential over commercial. Fire on the top floor Alpha Bravo corner. E34 is making a 200' ready line lead. all units switch to TAC 7 Direct"

- The vehicle radio (Mobile) is a more powerful radio than the portable radio. The vehicle radio transmits at a much higher wattage than the portable radios giving it a longer transmit range. Also due to the larger vehicle mounted antenna it will receive transmissions from a longer distance than the portable radios. The vehicle radio will give the responding Chiefs the earliest opportunity to transmit and receive Fire Ground radio traffic. Therefore, the tactical vehicle radio in the Chiefs Buggy shall be set to the assigned DIRECT Tactical Channel in the (FD B/U 1) zone.
- While enroute to the incident, one of the Chief's PORTABLE radios shall be set to the "A" zone (TAC 7 – TAC 16 Trunked)
- All life safety critical announcements i.e., evacuation orders etc. shall be broadcast on both the Direct Tactical channel and also on the Trunked Tactical Channel.

Incident Support Specialist

The ISS shall assist the IC with monitoring Tactical Radio Traffic. At incidents without a RIC company the ISS shall also monitor the corresponding Trunked Tactical channel.

RIC Company

While staging near the Command Post, the RIC Company will assist monitoring tactical radio traffic. The RIC officer shall set 1 portable radio to the corresponding Trunked Tactical Channel ("A" zone TAC7 – TAC 16).

- Example: If the incident is being conducted on (TAC 7D) in the "C" zone then the RIC Company shall also monitor (TAC 7) on the "A" zone.

Should any non-critical radio traffic occur on the Trunked Tactical Channel the RIC Officer shall redirect that member to the Direct Tactical Channel.

Should any critical radio traffic (mayday, emergency traffic etc.) occur on the trunked tactical channel then the RIC officer will immediately notify the Incident Commander directly.

Dispatch (DEC)

- DEC will continue to provide any updates over the control channels. The responding Division Chief shall update on-scene units via the Trunked Tactical Channel "A" zone (TAC 7-TAC 16)
- When an Incident Commander has switched to the Direct Tactical Channel DEC will announce this over the assigned Trunked Tactical Channel.

Example: "All companies at 1455 Balboa St., switch to TAC 7 Direct, repeating, All companies at 1455 Balboa St. switch to TAC 7 Direct".

- The Lieutenant and Rescue Captain at DEC along with the DEC Fire Supervisor, shall monitor the Trunked Tactical Channel for all Working Fires. This is to ensure that any radio traffic on the Trunked System is heard and acknowledged.
- **DEC cannot monitor Direct Tactical Channels**

RIC Communications

RIC Communications shall remain the same. RIC operations will be handled on the original tactical channel.

If the IC uses "A1" as the Tactical Channel for on-scene companies not involved in the RIC operation, they should announce over the original Tactical Channel (now the RIC) Channel "**All companies not involved in the rescue operation your tactical channel is now A1**"

The IC will then notify DEC that "A1" is now the incident tactical channel. DEC will then move all other radio traffic off of "A1". Ref. RIC Operations Manual 2012.

Emergency Button

The Emergency Button on the radio will work on the Direct Tactical Channels. Any member that hears an emergency activation that is not acknowledged by the Incident Commander shall notify the IC of the emergency activation. The alias (identifier) of the radio with the emergency activation will show on the displays of the radio.

Switching Between Trunked Tactical and Direct Tactical Channels

To switch between a trunked tactical channel and the corresponding direct tactical channel, toggle the A/B/C Switch between “A” and “C”

| | TRUNKED TACTICAL | | DIRECT TACTICAL |
|----|-----------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| | A | B | C |
| 1 | CONTROL 1 | BPRI BLW | BU DISP |
| 2 | CONTROL 2 | BPRI ABV | BU CTRL |
| 3 | CONTROL 3 | BSEC BLW | BU CMD |
| 4 | DISP 4 | BSEC ABV | BU MED |
| 5 | CMD 5 | BCMD BLW | 8TAC91 |
| 6 | CMD 6 | BCMD ABV | 8TAC92 |
| 7 | TAC 7 | CAFIRE 1 | TAC 7D |
| 8 | TAC 8 | FD DIR 1 | TAC 8D |
| 9 | TAC 9 | FD DIR 2 | TAC 9D |
| 10 | TAC 10 | EMS TAC 1 | TAC 10D |
| 11 | TAC 11 | EMS TAC 2 | TAC 11D |
| 12 | TAC 12 | EMS TAC 3 | TAC 12D |
| 13 | TAC 13 | TRANSPORT | TAC 13D |
| 14 | TAC 14 | SFGH BASE | TAC 14D |
| 15 | TAC 15 | MGS | TAC 15D |
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