



**ARCADIA FIRE DEPARTMENT  
STANDARD OPERATING GUIDELINE**

**MAYDAY PROCEDURES**

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has two standards that contain specific requirements regarding the safety and accountability of firefighters:

NFPA 1500 Standard on Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program

NFPA 1561 Standard on Emergency Services Incident Management System

**II. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this document is to provide a guideline for the rescue of firefighters through the implementation of area-wide Rapid Intervention Standard Operating Guideline (SOG). This guideline addresses the use of common terminology, multi-agency communication procedures, firefighter survival procedures, and expectations of command officers.

**III. GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**ACCOUNTABILITY** - Maintaining the status and location of all resources committed to an incident.

**CLEAR TEXT** - The use of plain language is intended to describe a clear picture and reduce confusion at incidents, particularly where different agencies are working together. Clear Text used plain English without Ten Codes and without agency specific terminology.

**COMMAND CHANNEL** - A radio channel, designated by the Incident Commander (IC), which is provided for communications between the IC and tactical-level management components (i.e. Divisions and Groups) during emergency incidents.

**COMPANY UNITY** – A term used to indicate that a fire company or unit shall remain together in a cohesive, identifiable working group, to ensure personnel accountability and the safety of all personnel. A company officer or unit leader shall be responsible for the adequate supervision, control, communication, and safety of the personnel of the company or unit.

**EMERGENCY/ALERT CHANNEL** – The radio channel utilized by firefighters reporting a Mayday. When the Emergency Alert Button (EAB) is activated, some handheld radios automatically switch to this channel and lock in the “repeat” mode until the radio is reset.

**EMERGENCY TRAFFIC** – The hailing term used to clear designated radio channels and alert incident personnel when a deteriorating or extremely hazardous condition exists, or there is a critical change in tactics that on-scene personnel need to be advised.

**EMERGENCY RADIO TONE** – A distinctive high/low tone initiated by the IC or communications center on the Command and Incident Tactical Channel(s).

**EMERGENCY ALERT BUTTON (EAB)** – The orange button located on the handheld radio, and on the lapel microphone. This button activates the emergency notification feature of the handheld radio, and is a critical component for firefighter safety. Depressing the button alerts the communications center and/or IC of a Mayday. The EAB is commonly referred to as the Emergency Trigger or E-Trigger.

**ESCAPE ROUTE** – A pre-planned and clearly identified route of travel that firefighting personnel are to take to access safety zones or other low risk areas.

**EVACUATION SIGNAL** – A measure taken that audibly signals to all personnel that there is an immediate need to evacuate a hazardous area of the incident. It will consist of repeated short blasts or the air horn for approximately 10 seconds, followed by a 10 second period of silence. This sequence of air horn blasts for 10 seconds followed by a 10 second period of silence will last 50 seconds. The IC shall designate specific apparatus to sound the evacuation signal using air horns. This should be done in conjunction with the radio announcement of “EMERGENCY TRAFFIC” following the Emergency Radio Tone. Clear directions must be given to scene personnel to evacuate the hazard area.

**FIREFIGHTER DOWN, FIREFIGHTER MISSING, or FIREFIGHTER TRAPPED** – Clear test terms used for radio communication to notify personnel on-scene at an emergency that a Mayday has or is occurring.

**IMMEDIATELY DANGEROUS TO LIFE OR HEALTH (IDLH)** – Any atmosphere that poses an immediate hazard to life or an atmosphere that produces immediate irreversible debilitating effects on the health of a human.

**INCIDENT TACTICAL CHANNEL** – The radio channel designated by the agency’s communication center or by the IC for tactical communications. Additional tactical channels may be required, depending on the scope and complexity of the incident.

**“MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY”** – The hailing term used to clear designated radio channels and alert incident personnel when a firefighter’s life is in danger and immediate assistance is required.

**PERSONNEL ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT (PAR)** – A verbal roll call of personnel and companies assigned to an incident. This roll call can be given by individual companies or by Divisions and Group.

**RADIO IDENTIFIER** - The unique pre-assigned alphanumeric code assigned to each radio. The alphanumeric code is transmitted each time the push to talk button is depressed.

**RAPID INTERVENTION COMPANY/CREW (RIC)** – A company/crew with fully equipped responders who are on the scene of an incident specifically assigned to initiate the immediate rescue of a firefighter.

**RAPID INTERVENTION GROUP (RIG)** – A functional component of the incident command system consisting of resources that are on the scene under the command of a Rapid Intervention Group Supervisor specifically assigned to initiate the immediate rescue of a firefighter.

**RAPID INTERVENTION TACTICAL CHANNEL** – The assigned tactical channel used by RIC or RIG. Personnel assigned to RIC or RIG will operate on this channel when communicating with other assigned rapid intervention personnel. This channel is not to be mistaken for or assigned as the Emergency Alert Channel.

**SELF-SURVIVAL PROCEDURES** - Actions of firefighter performs during a “MAYDAY” to alert rescuers and improves survivability.

**TWO OUT** – A company consisting of a minimum of two fully equipped responders who are on site and specifically assigned to initiate the immediate rescue of a firefighter.

#### **IV. COMMUNICATION**

During incidents, communication procedures must provide for the transmission and reception of both routine and emergency messages. Typically, these messages fall into four categories:

##### **A. Routing Tactical**

- Tactical direction from the IC assisting resource
- Tactical reports from the assisting resource to the IC
- Periodic PARs as needed or required by policy.

##### **B. Command**

- Overall incident management
- Routing messages to the communications center

##### **C. Emergency Traffic**

- Change in operations, offensive to defensive operations; withdraw personnel from the structure, etc.

#### D. Mayday

- Assisting agency resources must be able to transmit a Mayday situation in a manner that will be received by the IC, when a firefighter is down, missing or trapped.
- The IC must be able to notify all resources, including assisting agencies, whenever a Mayday situation exists in order to clear radio traffic in the case of a down, missing or trapped firefighter.
- The IC must be able to receive a Mayday from the assisting agency resource in order to initiate the appropriate response.

#### **Multi-agency Communications Options.**

When multiple agencies that do not share the same frequencies for day to day operations are working on an incident, there is a possibility for communication issues. Below are four scenarios to improve communications.

##### **1. Agency Representative**

The IC must ensure that they have a communication plan in place that provides for radio communications with all resources operating in the hazardous area. Consider requesting an agency representative from the assisting department to report to the ICP when inter-agency communications may be challenging.

- Personnel from the assisting agency will communicate with their Agency Representative per agency policy.
- The Agency Representative should remain at the ICP.
- The IC on any extended and/or greater alarm incident shall request an Agency Representative from an assisting agency when a firefighter from the assisting agency experiences a Mayday.

Caution is required when agencies do not have common communications and information is being relayed through an Agency Representative, as the company officer will not be able to hear communications between the IC and the other resources assigned to the incident.

##### **2. Each firefighter of the assisting agency comes equipped with a portable radio that is able to communicate on the Incident Tactical Channel.**

- The IC and personnel from the assisting agency will communicate on the Incident Tactical Channel
- The firefighter should transmit Mayday alerts on the Incident Tactical Channel.
- All personnel operating on the incident shall clear radio traffic.

**3. Only the company officer from the assisting agency has a portable radio that is able to communicate on the Incident Tactical Channel (either the officer brings a radio or obtains on from the ICP)**

- The IC should request an agency representative from an assisting agency to report to the ICP to maintain communications with the assisting agency's firefighters.
- The IC and company officer will communicate on the Incident Tactical Channel.
- The company office will communicate incident information and Mayday alerts with his/her crew using their agency's portable radio.
- The company officer must acknowledge a Mayday transmitted by one of his/her personnel and transmit the Mayday to the IC on the Incident Tactical Channel.

Caution must be exercised when utilizing this option. Crewmembers must maintain situational awareness and be prepared to initiate communication, as it does not take into account the company officer becoming incapacitated and being unable to communicate.

- If the company officer does not acknowledge a Mayday, the firefighter should activate the EAB.
- If the company officer from the assisting agency does not have a portable radio that can communicate with the ICP the company officer shall leave a firefighter at the ICP to provide a communication link between his/her company and the ICP.
- The company officer and the IC will engage in routine tactical communications through the firefighter providing the communication link at the ICP.
- Personnel, including the company officer, will transmit Mayday on the tactical frequency normally used by their agency.
- The firefighter providing the communication link at the ICP shall advise the IC of the Mayday.
- If the firefighter providing the communication link at the ICP does not acknowledge a Mayday, the firefighter should activate the EAB.
- The communication center must confirm the receipt of the Mayday with the IC.

Caution is required when using this option as the company officer will not be able to hear communications between the IC and other resources assigned to the incident.

**4. IC equipped to communicate with assisting agency**

- The IC and personnel from the assisting agency will communicate on the Incident Tactical Channel.
- The firefighter should transmit Mayday alerts on the Incident Tactical Channel.
- The IC shall request an Agency Representative to assist monitoring the assisting agency's dispatch channel and mayday/alert channel.
- If the IC is equipped with only one radio providing this capability, he/she should monitor the needed frequencies utilizing the Scan feature.

## **EAB Considerations**

There will be time when an EAB will be accidentally activated on an incident. The IC and resources assigned to rapid intervention must assume that any firefighter operating at an incident that has activated his/her EAB is in need of rescue until the activation is confirmed false. Some agencies utilize radios equipped with an EAB that, when activated, is not monitored by their communications center. In this case, it is the responsibility of the IC to monitor the Emergency/Alert Channel and respond to request for help on that frequency.

Caution must be exercised when it is recognized that an EAB utilized a simplex or direct channel. These EAB activations are not monitored by the communications center. The IC will need to monitor for activations and make the appropriate notifications to the communications center.

## **V. FIREFIGHTER SURVIVAL PROCEDURES**

### **Person(s) Needing Rescue**

An individual assigned to an incident shall use the hailing term “Mayday, Mayday, Mayday” to announce a “*Firefighter Missing, Down or Trapped*”. This shall be initiated by a member when his/her life is in danger and the situation cannot be corrected in 30 seconds. **The “Mayday” call shall be delivered on the Incident Tactical Channel.** A “Mayday” shall also be initiated by any member assigned to an incident if they have knowledge that another firefighter’s life is in danger and they need immediate assistance.

Note: If after two (2) “Mayday” attempts the member does not receive acknowledgement on the incident tactical channel he/she shall activate the Emergency Alert Button (EAB) and declare the “Mayday” again verbally. An individual assigned to an incident, shall use the hailing term “Mayday, Mayday, Mayday” to announce a Firefighter Down, Missing or Trapped. This hailing shall be used for themselves, or for another firefighter that is in danger and requires immediate assistance.

### **Initiate a Mayday**

The following situations require the immediate initiation of a Mayday call.

- Injured and/or Disabled (Firefighter Down) resulting in reduced ability to exit safely.
- Separated from Crew or lost (Firefighter Missing). Loss of visibility or no physical contact with hose line and/or partner.
- Trapped, pinned, and/or entangled in debris (Firefighter Trapped) mobility compromised due to heat, structural collapse, debris, and/or inoperable/blocked doors/exits.
- Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) malfunction or low air alarm activation in an IDLH and unable to reach an exit.

- Any life threatening condition that cannot be resolved in 30 seconds. The 30- second rule serves as a reminder to focus on self-rescue and to gather as much information about the situation as possible.

Once a member recognizes they are in a “Mayday” situation or if any other member becomes aware of a member in a “Mayday” situation, it is imperative to give simple, but pertinent information, using the three “W’s” method (**Who, What, Where**). This will assist in locating and rescuing the member in need. The following is a scenario and example of the three “W’s” along with a sample radio communication.

**SCENARIO:** Firefighter Smith from Engine 31 becomes trapped while fighting fire on the third floor towards the Bravo side. It is important the who, what and where is obtained from the down firefighter. Below is a sample exchange of information.

**Radio Communication:**

FF Smith: “MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY”

IC: Initiate or request emergency tones from dispatch to clear radio frequencies;

IC: Transmit “All Companies clear this channel for a Mayday. Member calling Mayday, go!”

FF Smith: “This is Firefighter Smith from Engine 31” (**WHO** are you?) “I am Trapped, I need Help” (**WHAT** is your condition?) “I am on Third Floor Bravo side”

(**WHERE** are you?)

The IC will then acknowledge the trapped firefighter and initiate a rescue immediately.

**VI. EXPECTATIONS OF COMMAND**

**Incident Commander Responsibilities**

In the initial stages of the incident, the IC shall maintain accountability by documenting situation and resource status. On large or complex incidents, additional staff may be assigned to oversee these functions. Each Branch Director, Division and Group Supervisor, and Company Officer is responsible for maintaining accountability of all personnel and resources under their command.

At an emergency incident, the IC shall be responsible for the overall management of the incident and the safety of all personnel involved at the scene. The IC shall:

- Be responsible for overall personnel accountability for the incident.
- Designate Two Out team, Rapid Intervention Crew/Company, or Rapid Intervention Group according to the safety needs of the incident.
- Maintain an awareness of the location and function of all companies or crews at the scene of an incident.

- Initiate an accountability worksheet at the beginning of the incident and maintain the system throughout the operation.
- Provide for additional accountability based on the size, complexity, or needs of the incident. This can be accomplished by reducing the span of control.
- Provide for communications and interoperability with mutual aid resources.
- Provide resources for the rescue of personnel operating at emergency incident

### **Branch Director/Division and Group Supervisor Responsibilities**

- Supervise and account for companies and/or crews operating in their specific area of responsibility.
- Obtain briefings from the IC.
- Position companies for effective deployment.
- Facilitate the tracking and accountability of assigned companies and crews.

### **Company Officer Responsibilities**

- Directly accountable for members under their command.
- Maintain an ongoing awareness of the location and condition of all company personnel.

## **VII. INCIDENT COMMANDER MAYDAY PROCEDURES**

When a May Day situation is reported, the Incident Commander is responsible for ensuring the following actions are taken:

### **A. Procedures Prior to a Mayday Occurring**

- The IC is maintaining accountability of resources assigned to the incident
- The IC is monitoring fire ground conditions and evaluating the effectiveness of current tactics
- The IC is monitoring the necessary channels.

Rapid Intervention Group Tactical Channel (If Assigned)  
Emergency Channels 14 & 16  
Administrative (Dispatch) Channel as Assigned  
Incident Command Channel if assigned  
Incident Tactical Channel(s)



## **B. Procedures During Mayday Incident**

1. The IC states “All companies on the incident clear this radio channel unless you have emergency traffic, firefighter calling a Mayday identify”
2. The IC documents necessary Who, What and Where information.
3. The IC will advise companies working on the incident the type of emergency, advise them to maintain company units and radio discipline.
4. The IC will notify dispatch center of the Mayday, request additional resources and request an Emergency Alert Tone if the tone will not interfere with rescue operations.
5. The IC will deploy the rapid intervention crew or instruct RIG to do so.
6. The IC will have all companies maintaining their current operation assignment unless redirected for initial rescue.
7. The IC or RIG will maintain constant communication with the member declaring the Mayday.

## **C. Procedures After a Mayday Incident**

After a Mayday situation, the IC should:

1. Conduct a PAR of all companies to ensure all members are accounted for.
2. Once the PAR is complete and all personnel are accounted for the IC should transmit to all companies “All Clear – Resume normal radio communications”.
3. Notify the dispatch center the Mayday has concluded.
4. Ensure the firefighter that experienced the Mayday received a medical evaluation.