



# POLICE SCIENCE

## POLICE FIELD COMMUNICATIONS



# Police Field Communications

## ~ CHAPTER 36 ~

Topics and concepts included in this chapter:

1. The basic features of a portable radio
2. The functions of the Communications Section and its dispatchers
3. The information transmitted via radio (particularly locations designated "hazardous" or "sensitive")
4. The radio code signals used by the Department
5. The procedures to follow when using a public telephone to conduct official police business

Mandatory Patrol Guide Procedures

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P.G. 214-35 Processing QOL Complaints Using the 311 Terminal



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### PART I: NYPD'S COMMUNICATION NETWORK

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Communications occur between the NYPD and the public, as well as exchanges of information that take place daily over our police radios, computers, telephones, and other electronic networks. For patrol officers, the most important method of communication is the police radio, found both in patrol cars and carried by officers. It will enable you to be part of the Department's radio network and will be *one of the most important tools you will have at your disposal*.

This Department's electronic communications network is the means through which we conduct most of our business. It is how we learn about, and respond to, emergencies and the method through which we learn about, and handle most of the situations that require our non-emergency services. The NYPD's communications network is among the most advanced in the world, linking our vast resources with a centrally located dispatching facility, and handling more business every day than any other police department in this country and, probably, more than any other in the world. You need to know about it because it is the method through which we conduct the vast majority of our business, and it has been expanded by the addition of a 311 system, designed to handle non-emergency communications.

Your instructor will assist you in developing proficiency in communication procedures and radio operations. This lesson will acquaint you with:

- The basic features of a portable radio
- The functions of the Communications Section and its dispatchers
- The information transmitted via radio (particularly locations designated "hazardous" or "sensitive")
- The *radio code signals* utilized by the Department
- The procedures to follow when using a public telephone to conduct official police business

Anyone who has heard a busy police radio must wonder how those listening can understand what is going on. While it takes some time to develop an *ear* for the radio, the ability to hear the radio improves with experience. Much of this can be learned in a formal training setting. Future field experience will help you sharpen what has been learned in the classroom. Once you have developed this ear, it will become second nature and you are unlikely to ever lose it.



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Our radio network uses a set of *10-codes*, which was established for use over the airwaves as a type of shorthand, due to the high volume of radio transmissions and the need to transmit assignments - or *jobs* - and calls for assistance quickly. These radio codes, or *signals*, enable us to receive calls for assistance as well as transmit calls in a relatively short span of time. If you have experience in using other agencies' 10-codes, you will find that ours are different and far more extensive than most. This is so because the variety of police business is so extensive that we had to develop a unique 10-code system of our own.

### THE COMMUNICATIONS SECTION

The Communications Section dispatches millions of radio runs each year. Each incident is routed from the 911 operator to the radio dispatcher's computer terminal, referred to as the "queue." The radio dispatcher then assigns the unit, transmits the information, handles interim messages or notifications, and enters a final disposition when the unit reports that the job is completed. This is repeated thousands of times each day. A competent and efficient dispatcher does this job quickly and accurately, and plays a major role in expediting police assistance to those in need.

There are numerous frequencies in operation at the Communications Section. Most frequencies in use handle transmissions to and from you, the officer on patrol. The Special Operations Division and Traffic frequencies control Harbor, Aviation, and Highway units; and still other citywide frequencies control miscellaneous units and provide back-up frequencies for patrol units. These last citywide frequencies can be utilized during major emergencies or disasters so that units at the scene can switch their radios from their local frequencies to the citywide frequency over which the emergency is being controlled. The citywide frequencies are commonly referred to as *Citywide 1, 2, 3 and 4*.

The Communications Section is responsible for receiving information from the public regarding reported crimes and other occurrences, and for transmitting this information to field units. When a person wishes to report some type of emergency to the police, they will call 911. This will connect them with a police telephone operator located at the Communications Section. The necessary information will be obtained and typed into a computer system linking the operator with radio dispatchers. The radio dispatcher, assigned to a specific radio frequency covering several precincts, will then transmit the information to the post or sector concerned.

This information will come in a standard format. Generally, the location and type of assignment are transmitted, along with any qualifying details. These details may include the name of the person to be met at the scene, a description of a suspect, or the number of separate calls received by 911 operators about the incident (which may indicate whether the assignment is founded or unfounded).



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### I/CAD

The Intergraph's Computer Aided Dispatch application (I/CAD) is used by Operations Unit personnel (call takers and dispatchers) to capture event and unit information. This information represents the incidents created during 911 calls, plus all unit information tracked during the lifetime of the event, such as assigned units, their times, interim assignments, and the finalization codes applied at the closure of the event. I/CAD tracks initial 911 calls, and based on location throughout the city, electronically directs the input to the dispatcher having the control and responsibility of assigning precinct units in the appropriate geographical area. I/CAD documents the caller's name and callback number as well as conversations with the 911 operator including all necessary details of the job.

### COMMUNICATIONS SECTION KEY TERMINOLOGIES

- **ANI-ALI** – aka “the call back”
  - **ANI** – Automatic Number Indicator (caller ID)
  - **ALI** – Automatic Location Indicator (billing address of phone & person phone is billed to, not necessarily location of the phone)
- **ALERT** – If Central is holding more than three (3) jobs, but less than (5) jobs.
- **BACKLOG** – If Central is holding five (5) or more jobs, or one (1) job for more than half (1/2) an hour.

### HAZARDOUS AND SENSITIVE LOCATIONS

Some areas throughout the City have been designated *hazardous* or *sensitive* locations, with respect to the safety of responding police personnel. These locations are defined as follows:

**Hazardous location:** Presents a threat to the safety of responding personnel. It may also require a response by two or more units or by specialized equipment. The threat may be from individuals, groups, or physical conditions (e.g., explosive storage area, a radiation hazard, firearm storage area, etc.).

**Sensitive location:** May be subject to demonstrations or may result in diplomatic or political confrontation (e.g., a foreign mission, consulate, residences of political or



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foreign officials, or certain religious establishments). These locations have a response plan previously developed at the precinct level and consistent with the needs of the Department and occupants of the location in question.

These locations have been noted in the Emergency 911 Computer System. Whenever a Communications Section dispatcher is assigning patrol personnel, the dispatcher will relay this information to the units concerned.

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### PART II: RADIO DISCIPLINE AND GENERAL RADIO PROCEDURES

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The police radio is your contact with other officers on patrol and the dispatcher. It serves as not only a means of transmitting assignments, but also a way of calling for help, broadcasting alarms, and coordinating field activities. It is essential that we practice “courtesy, professionalism, and respect,” while utilizing the portable radio and making transmissions. Use your 10-codes where possible to avoid lengthy conversation. Your transmissions are monitored by the Department and by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). *All* transmissions are recorded and can be subpoenaed.

Always know where you are at all times. When entering a location, such as a building or a business establishment, write down the building number or the business name. If the location is a subway station, know the station name, station line, closest booth number, stairway, and platform location. While on patrol in an RMP or on foot, know the name of the street you are on, the cross streets, and your direction of travel, (north, south, east, west, etc.) By knowing your exact location at all times, should an emergency arise, you will be able to inform the dispatcher of your location and get help much faster. Whenever you contact the dispatcher, such as Citywide 1 for warrant checks, the dispatcher will ask for your location first if you have not already informed them prior to conducting the warrant check. The bottom line is **ALWAYS KNOW YOUR LOCATION!**

Even though the Department’s portable radios are the best available, they are quite fragile. Tests conducted by the Communications Section have shown that accidentally dropping one on the floor can render it useless. The tests also included forcibly throwing a portable radio while in its case, against a wall. This test revealed that the case protected the radio to such a degree that no damage was inflicted. Damage to a portable radio costs money, and means another officer will be deprived of its use while it is being repaired. When damage to a radio occurs and negligence on the part of the officer can be shown, disciplinary proceedings will be initiated against the officer. It is in the best interest of the individual officer to safeguard the radio against damage. It is required, therefore, that the radio be carried in its leather case.

In addition, many portable radios have been lost or stolen. Replacing a lost or



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stolen portable radio is expensive. A Department radio in the wrong hands affords an individual the opportunity to jam-up or make unauthorized transmissions on the Department's radio frequency. This may prevent emergency messages from being heard or transmitted or even divert officers away from the scenes of crimes or other emergencies. The potential danger of this problem cannot be overemphasized. Always make certain that your portable radio is on your person; **never** leave it in a Department vehicle or unattended in any place.

Portable radios are transistorized; therefore, require no warm up time. They are ready for transmission within a few seconds of being turned on. The charging terminals at the base of the radio can create an electrical short of sufficient intensity that can detonate loose rounds of ammunition. Follow these safety procedures to prevent such occurrences:

- Carry radios in their leather carrying cases to prevent exposure of the charging terminals.
- Handle loose ammunition with caution.

The most fundamental principle in operating the radio is that it must be turned on to be useful. A light on its face (portables and mobile units) indicates that it is in operation. The radio is designed to operate on several frequencies; therefore, you must ensure that it remains tuned to the frequency for the area for which you will be patrolling. Only in extreme emergencies, or at the direction of the Communications Section dispatcher, should you change to another frequency.

### ACCEPTABLE CONDUCT

- Transmit **ONLY** in the performance of duty.
- Always begin transmissions by identifying your command and car or assignment first (e.g., "eight-four Adam to Central, k."). This allows the radio dispatcher to know that the crew of RMP Sector Adam in the 84th Precinct is trying to reach them.
- Identify your unit or unit designation whenever calling Central, including requests for radio checks.
- In most instances, wait for the dispatcher to acknowledge that they have heard you **before** proceeding with a message (the dispatcher may be on the phone getting EMS or the fire department for another unit). **Do not wait for an acknowledgment in an emergency (10-13).**



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- Make messages short and to the point.
- Make sure that the first thing you tell the dispatcher in an emergency (e.g., 10-13) is your *exact location*; therefore, it is important to *always* know where you are. If you do not manage to get the information over the air in an understandable way, other members of the service will not know where to respond. They only have the sound of urgency in your voice to alert them that you are in an emergency. When transmitting an emergency message try to remain calm and control your voice and actions.
- Be mindful that the sound of messages transmitted over the radio may announce your arrival to criminals at a crime scene. You may reduce the volume on your radio so as not to give criminals an advantage.
- Give all numbers individually and then, as a whole (e.g., “one-eight-six East two-seven street; one-eighty-six East twenty-seventh Street”).
- Keep the dispatcher informed of any change of location in assignment. For example, if you *are* sent to apartment 4R on an assignment, but on arrival, you find that the job is in apartment 3R, tell the dispatcher. If you need help, they will be sent to the last location recorded by the dispatcher.
- Give interim and final dispositions back as soon as possible. The dispatcher **must** ask for a disposition after twenty (20) minutes has transpired from the start of an assignment.

*Note: If the dispatcher shows that you are on an assignment, and another job in your sector comes in, another unit will have to be assigned, leaving two (2) sectors uncovered. Transmit a final disposition immediately upon completion of assignment and before leaving the scene.*

- Speak in a normal tone of voice. Hold the radio approximately two inches from your mouth.
- Use the expression “K” to signify the end of your transmission and allow for incoming transmissions; “ten-four” for message received and understood.

A police officer, using a portable radio, must preface each transmission with their *call sign* (sector car, foot post, holiday post, RMP #, etc.). A police officer will identify their unit designation whenever calling the dispatcher (called “Central” in radio transmissions), including all requests for radio or signal checks, and will end all transmissions (except for the final one in an exchange of calls with the dispatcher), with the letter “K.” **K** indicates that a particular transmission is over and that its sender is