

## **Falmouth Fire-EMS Operating Guideline**

### **Fire Alarm Dispatch Procedures**

#### **Objective:**

To provide guidelines for dispatching emergency calls through Falmouth Public Safety Dispatch and for members contacting Falmouth Public Safety Dispatch (also called Fire Alarm).

#### General Information:

Falmouth Public Safety Dispatch (Fire Alarm) handles emergency and non-emergency communications for the Towns of Falmouth and Yarmouth. This includes handling incoming phone calls, radio traffic, and walk-in traffic for fire, police, EMS, and public works. At most times, there will be two communications officers on duty, but there will be times when there is only one communications officer on duty. Fire-EMS personnel should limit their calls and visits to dispatch so that the dispatchers are able to focus on their important jobs.

#### Important Terminology:

**Still Alarm** - An incident such as fire alarm, downed power lines, motor vehicle crash, outside smell of smoke or gas, or other request for the fire department that does not involve the building reported to be on fire. Still boxes can be upgraded if needed, but most are handled with the initial apparatus dispatched to the scene. The majority of incidents are still boxes.

**Desk Box** - An incident that has a high likelihood that something may be burning inside a building. Common reasons for toning out a desk box include the smell of smoke inside a building, a report of fire in, on, or next to a building, or an electrical burning or gas smell inside a building. All other incidents are toned out as a Still Boxes. The fire department responses to each are different. Falmouth crews, for example, only use emergency lights and siren to a still box if they are the district engine, ambulance, and chief/duty officer. For a desk box, all Falmouth Fire-EMS units will respond with emergency lights and siren.

#### **Guidelines:**

##### **A. Policy on Contacting Dispatch**

Whereas the Town of Falmouth Public Safety Dispatch Center may have only one dispatcher on duty at any given time the official policy on contacting is as follows.

1. Fire-EMS Department personnel are to contact dispatch for official business only.

2. Nobody, except for chief officers, is to contact the dispatcher to question policy and operational procedures.
3. Personnel are encouraged to use pagers and/or portables to alert them of emergency calls. If a member is unsure if there is a call or if they are needed, they are to respond to their respective stations and contact the Incident Commander.
4. Some towns may have software systems, such as I Am Responding, that will alert members of incidents. I Am Responding (IAR) Paging is available to all Falmouth Fire-EMS members to help notify them of calls. I Am Responding paging, however, should only be used as a backup since some call types are not paged based on how the call initially comes in to dispatch (ex. A police incident that later turns into an EMS call will not be paged out on IAR paging since the original call type is a police incident. Same with a minor MVA that starts as PD-only and then becomes a medical emergency). Dispatch will try to dispatch calls as fire calls whenever possible to ensure IAR paging is triggered. The pager or portable radio is the best means of being assured members are notified of incidents.
5. Dispatch does have access to I Am Responding. On their screen they can see members listed who are responding to calls. Departments that have I Am Responding are encouraged to have members utilize this in place of signing on with dispatch via the radio when in route to the station(s).
6. Members should not call dispatch during an incident unless they are the Incident Commander (or directed to do so by the Incident Commander) or Fire Chief/Duty Officer.
7. Personnel are encouraged to listen for incident information given by dispatch after the recall is transmitted or contact another station for information needed for the incident report.
  - a. Only after these two avenues are exhausted should personnel call the dispatcher for incident times and numbers.
  - b. Personnel can contact dispatch to report emergencies.
8. Under no circumstances is anyone permitted to call and give dispatch instructions during a call or special event. During these times dispatch SOG's or the Incident Commander will dictate how they will cover other calls or requests.

9. SOGs are in place to cover a variety of circumstances. Obviously, every situation can't be thought of in advance. Every effort has been made to cover as much as possible and anything that may have been missed shall be addressed using the Fire Department's Chain of Command.
10. Only a Chief Officer may contact dispatch to place an announcement on the evening or weekly tone test.
11. Personnel are not to walk into the dispatch center unless on official department business.
12. Any person not adhering to this policy may be brought before their Fire Department's discipline review and appropriate discipline may be issued.

#### B. Tone Test

1. Dispatch will conduct a daily tone test for Yarmouth Fire and Rescue at 1755 hours and a weekly tone test for Falmouth Fire-EMS at 1800 hours on Monday nights only. The procedure is as follows:
  - i. Pre-announce: "Fire Alarm on the air with the 1755-hour tone test".
  - ii. Activate Fire and EMS tones.
  - iii. Make any announcement needed or requested.
  - iv. State: "Fire Alarm Clear".

#### C. Burning Permits

1. Permits will be issued only on State Class 1 or Class 2 days with sustained winds below 15 miles per hour.
2. Permits will be issued after 9 am (after the class day is received).
3. Online permits are available and can be obtained by residents. Dispatch will receive an e-mail notification of all online permits obtained.
4. Safety Requirements for Burning:
  - i. No burning within 50 feet of a residence.
  - ii. An adult must be present at all times.
  - iii. Hand Tools (i.e. brooms, rakes, etc.) must be on site of the burn.
  - iv. Water supply must be on site (garden hose or buckets of water).
  - v. Winds must be below 15 mph.

5. Fire Class Notification is as follows:

- i. Class 1 – Low Danger
- ii. Class 2 – Moderate Danger
- iii. Class 3 – High Danger (no permits issued)
- iv. Class 4 – Very High Danger (no permits issued)
- v. Class 5 – Extreme Danger (no permits issued)

6. Bon Fire

- i. Fire Chief (or designee) must approve all requests for Bon Fires.

D. Fire ground Frequencies (Operation Channels)

- 1. Fire Alarm or the Incident Commander (IC) may assign an operational channel(s) for a specific incident to allow the Primary Repeater channels to remain open for other calls.
- 2. If the IC or Fire Alarm assigns fire ground channel(s), the IC, or another Chief Officer at the Command Post shall remain scanning the Primary Channel (1) for Fire Alarm.
- 3. When command is terminated at an incident, all units shall switch back all radios to Primary Repeater channel, Channel 1.

E. The Communication Model (How to talk and answer on the radio)

- 1. All Personnel, Fire & EMS, Fire Alarm Dispatchers
  - i. When a message is transmitted on the radio, the receiver of the message shall confirm reception of the message (if pertinent to an EMS Response or Fire Ground Operation) by briefly re-phrasing the message. Such confirmation will notify the sender of the message that the receiver understands the message. All radio communications shall be addressed and conducted according to this model and script.
  - ii. All units (Car #'s, Apparatus) shall use the town identifier when communicating on the primary channels. Example: **Falmouth** Engine 1, **Yarmouth** Engine 81, etc.
  - iii. Falmouth Public Safety dispatch will answer to the call sign "Fire Alarm" on each of the primary dispatch channels.

F. Scripted Radio Traffic

- 1. Fire and EMS calls shall be transmitted as follows:
  - i. Pre-Announcement shall read:
    - 1. "Fire Alarm to all units standby for a still box in District 2."  
Or: "Ambulance 2 stand by for an EMS call to Phillips

Road” (Note: There is no need for a long pre-announcement. When there are long pre-announcements some info is left out on the actual dispatch. Also, many members do not hear the message because they don’t hear any message until their pager has been activated).

2. Activate Tones

ii. Transmitting of alarm shall read:

1. “Fire Alarm transmitting still box 234 for Falmouth Engine 2 and Falmouth Ambulance 2 to 305 Middle Road for a reported Motor Vehicle Crash with Injury (and repeat). Time of call 1426 hours.
2. Information flow: Box #, Address or location, nature of call, Assignment, time of call.
3. Note: Fire Alarm shall TRANSMIT a Still Box and STRIKE a Desk Box.

iii. Dispatch will repeat transmission every 30 seconds until first unit signs on responding. If no apparatus signs on within 4 minutes (and there are no responders listed on I Am Responding), re-tone and repeat assignment transmitting next due Engine along with apparatus already assigned.

1. For an EMS call, if there is no response (and no responders on I Am Responding) 2 minutes after the re-tone immediately and call a mutual aid ambulance.

iv. Provide pertinent information to responding units such as:

1. Re-state the address of the incident to the first responding apparatus.
2. Advise the first and second due Engines when they sign on, of the hydrant locations according to the run card.
3. Advise first unit responding (whether apparatus or officer, Car #) of any pertinent or special information as displayed on the assignment card or as obtained from the caller, or others.
4. Advise all units of cross streets if requested by a responding officer or apparatus. (Cross streets should be provided for a new street if possible).

v. All traffic will be answered by Fire Alarm as such:

1. Receiver: “Fire Alarm answering Elm Street Command.”
2. Receiver:” Fire Alarm answering Ambulance 85.”

## 2. Emergency Responses

- i. Fire and EMS units shall communicate as follows:
  1. Sender: "Fire Alarm to Yarmouth Chief 801"
  2. Receiver: "North Yarmouth Chief 801 answering Fire Alarm"
  3. Sender: "Caller indicates a child pulled the alarm"
  4. Receiver: "Yarmouth Chief 801 copies report that a child pulled the alarm."
  5. When communicating with Fire Alarm signing on as responding, the sender shall identify him/her self or apparatus and transmit the message with the number of firefighters and probationary employees. Senders shall not call Fire Alarm and await response before sending message.
  6. Sender: "Falmouth Engine 4, Fire Alarm, Responding with 4 to 200 Gray Road"
- ii. On emergency responses, Fire Alarm will confirm reception of the message by briefly re-stating pertinent emergent traffic as outlined.
  1. Sender: "Falmouth Car 1 Fire Alarm."
  2. Receiver: "Fire Alarm answering Falmouth Car 1"
  3. Sender: "Falmouth Car 1 on scene 2 ½ story wood frame, fire showing on Alpha-side, Strike the Working Fire."
  4. Receiver: "Fire Alarm copies, Falmouth Car 1 on scene fire showing on Alpha-side, striking the Working Fire."
- iii. Individual units and apparatus will answer as follows:
  1. Sender: "Fire Alarm Falmouth Tower 2"
  2. Receiver: "Falmouth Tower 2"
- iv. When communicating on a frequency from one mobile radio to another, the sender shall utilize the same communication procedure as outlined. The sender should call the receiver, identify themselves (Do NOT go through Fire Alarm), and wait for reply and transmit the message.
  1. Sender: "Yarmouth Chief 804 from Yarmouth Chief 801"
  2. Receiver: "Yarmouth Chief 804"
  3. Sender: "Report to North Road at 1100 hours."
  4. Receiver: "Yarmouth Chief 804 copies North Road 1100 hours."
- v. Obtaining Information:
  1. Dispatch should obtain the following information for each request for service:

- a. Location (and directions if necessary) of the call, nature of the call, name and telephone number of the called.
- b. Tone out and dispatch appropriate fire and/or EMS units to the scene.
- c. Advise responding units of pertinent information.
- d. Enter the call into the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD).

vi. Fire Calls:

1. For fire calls use the run card monitor to determine which apparatus to dispatch to the incident.
  - a. The IC may alter or cancel units as needed.
  - b. If the run card monitor is not working, there is a hard copy of the run cards for each town in dispatch.

vii. EMS Calls:

1. Falmouth has three ambulances – two located at Central Station and one at Foreside Station (Station 1). As a rule, dispatch sends Ambulance 2 if available. A2 is staffed 24x7 at the paramedic level. If A2 is not available send Ambulance 3. If A3 is not available, send Ambulance 1. A3 and A1 are not staffed.
2. Yarmouth has two ambulances located at North Road Station. As a rule, dispatch Ambulance 85 for odd months (January, March, May, July, September, and November). Dispatch Ambulance 86 for even months (February, April, June, August, October, and December).
3. Common Sense and good judgement must be exercised in the dispatching of certain calls where the nature of the call should not be transmitted over the air (HIV patient, mental disorder, etc.) In those cases, dispatch the appropriate EMS unit and have them call into dispatch via phone for more information.
4. If the scene may endanger a first responder advise the EMS units to stage away from the scene until a Police Officer has determined the area to be secure. Dispatch appropriate Police Officers to the scene.

viii. Multiple EMS Calls:

1. When multiple EMS calls come in, dispatch will tone the appropriate town and only call mutual aid ambulance if all of the in-town ambulances are exhausted or unavailable.

2. If an out of town ambulance is brought in an Engine Company shall be dispatched as well (for Knox Key entry, lift assist, first respond, etc.).
- ix. Lifting Help at an EMS Call:
1. If the Incident Commander at an EMS call asks for additional help lifting, Fire Alarm will transmit both fire and EMS tones and ask for additional help to respond direct to the scene. Members have been instructed to tell Fire Alarm exactly how many other responders are needed. Fire Alarm will not dispatch an Engine Company unless asked to by the IC.
- x. Interstate/Turnpike Calls:
1. If an ambulance is called to respond to a limited access highway (I-295, Spur, or Maine Turnpike/I-95) dispatch will tone out the district engine to respond as well to be used as a blocker to create a safe working space for the ambulance crew.
  2. Only department vehicles are to respond to the limited access highways.
  3. If Maine State Police is not the originating source of the call, please contact Gray State Police barracks to notify them of the incident.
  4. Departments may stage apparatus at the entrance to the highways. For example, for motor vehicle crashes on I-295 Falmouth Engine 1, Engine 2 and Ambulance 2 will be dispatched. Falmouth Engine 1 will stage at Central unless called to the highway by command.
- xi. Mutual Aid Calls:
1. Mutual aid requests may come in from other agencies for Fire units, EMS units, or possible just a paramedic. Dispatch all calls over the air. If it is for a paramedic, dispatch the appropriate ambulance and the paramedic will determine if the ambulance response or just a staff vehicle.
  2. For requests for fire apparatus dispatch the unit requested if applicable. If not, use the mutual aid matrix. If there are questions, ask for the fire chief or duty officer to call in.
3. Task Force / Strike Team Requests
- a. A Task Force is a team of two engines and 1 aerial (ladder or tower). A Strike Team is three of



the same units (ex. 3 ambulances, 3 tankers, 3 aeriels, etc.). There are up to 10 levels of strike teams and task forces available for each community.

- b. Requests for task force or strike team units from Falmouth and Yarmouth will be dispatched as requested. Requests for mutual aid task force or strike team units will be requested through Portland Dispatch Center.

xii. Response Codes:

- 1. Response codes utilized by responding units are as follows:
  - a. Code 1 – Proceed with flow of traffic
  - b. Code 3 – Emergency response (lights and siren)
  - c. Code 99 – Full cardiac arrest.
- 2. EMS Priorities:
  - a. Priority 1 – Emergency
  - b. Priority 2 – Urgent
  - c. Priority 3 – Proceed Normal.

3. Apparatus and Personnel Signing off “On scene”

- i. The first arriving unit on scene of an emergency shall transmit to Fire Alarm that they are on scene, give a brief size-up of the building/scene, request any additional resources needed, and establish Command.
- ii. The First Apparatus on scene will still transmit to Fire Alarm they are on scene. Other apparatus arriving from this point shall just announce that they are on scene and not hail Fire Alarm.
- iii. Apparatus responding shall only call the IC to notify being on scene if they are not within view of the scene.
- iv. All radio traffic shall go through the IC at this point. Apparatus responding should only call the IC if they have traffic relative to the operations.
- v. The second due Engine will call the IC stating they are off at the hydrant.
- vi. Individual Officers or Direct Responders will follow the same procedure if on scene first. If they are not the first on scene, they do not need to sign off with Fire Alarm or the IC and shall report directly to the Command Post or IC. The exception is that Chief Officers will sign on scene at all times.

4. Returning Apparatus

- i. The IC shall return any apparatus, either on scene or in route to the scene, that he/she deems unessential to the operation.

Those apparatus shall sign in service with Fire Alarm after notification.

1. Example:

- a. "Fire Alarm from Command"
- b. "Fire Alarm answering Command"
- c. "Falmouth Engine 4 and Falmouth Engine 2 can handle; return the balance"
- d. "Fire Alarm copies, all apparatus with the exception of Falmouth Engine 4 and Falmouth Engine 2 can return to quarters"
- e. "Falmouth Tank 4 copies, returning, in service."

5. Terminating Command

- i. After all operations are complete and the entire compliment has been cleared from any emergency call, the IC shall transmit to Fire Alarm the status of the call and the okay for the recall of the box (note: "Recalling the box" places all apparatus from the scene back in service in IMC).

1. Example:

- a. "Fire Alarm from Command"
- b. "Fire Alarm answering Command"
- c. "Food on the stove, building has been ventilated, all apparatus in service returning, okay on the recall, Command Terminated"
- d. "Falmouth Fire Alarm, striking the recall on Desk Box 316 @ 1948 hrs. Your run number is XXX and the time of call was XXXX hours"

6. Details or Events

- i. All radio traffic for special events or details shall use a pre-determined radio frequency other than the primary operational channels of the Department whenever possible.

## G : Emergency Notification Procedures

1. Fire Chief (Falmouth and Yarmouth)

- i. Dispatch will contact the Fire Chief when any of the following occur:
- ii. A firefighter or EMT is injured during an incident
- iii. Notification of a death of a department member
- iv. Motor Vehicle Crash or Fire with a confirmed fatality
- v. Multiple Alarm incident in town (Working Fire/All Hands or greater)
- vi. Multiple Fire Apparatus are being sent out of town.
- vii. An operational question.

2. Notification of the Fire Chief will be made by:
  - i. Radio 1st
  - ii. Cell Phone Text 2nd
  - iii. Cell Phone Call 3rd
  - iv. Fire Pager 4th (fire tones)
3. Emergency Management Director (Falmouth, Yarmouth, and North Yarmouth)
  - i. Dispatch will contact the Emergency Management Director when any of the following occur:
  - ii. Widespread power outage lasting more than 3 hours.
  - iii. One or more roads are closed due to flooding.
  - iv. A request for a shelter has been received.
  - v. At any time as requested by a Town, State, or County Official
4. Weekend Duty Officer (currently only used in Falmouth)
  - i. Dispatch will contact the Falmouth Weekend Duty Officer when any of the following occur:
    1. A question on a burning permit or to check the status of issuing burn permits
    2. An operational question on the weekend and the Chief is not able to be reached.
5. Apparatus Out of Service:
  - i. When apparatus is placed out of service mark the unit unavailable in the CAD. This will cause the run card monitor to pull in the next available apparatus. Be sure to mark the unit available when it is placed back in service.
  - ii. Falmouth Fire-EMS may also mark the apparatus out of service in I Am Responding.

These guidelines may be changed or altered by the Fire-EMS Chief at any time.