

Communications

The ACT Rural Fire Service Chief Officer has issued this standard operating procedure under Section 38(1) of the *Emergencies Act 2004* – A Chief Officer may determine standards and protocols.

Purpose

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to ensure efficient and effective use of the communications networks available in the ACT for use by the ACT Rural Fire Service (ACT RFS) for operational and non-operational activities. These include the use of the Territory Radio Network (TRN) and Sub-Tactical Radio Network to support the use of CB radios.

Applicability

This SOP is applicable to all personnel from RFS brigades and RFS staff when engaging in any ACT RFS activities.

Background

The TRN is the primary network for emergency communication in the ACT. It is supplemented by the ACT RFS sub-tactical radio network which complements the TRN network. This sub-tactical radio network uses UHF Citizen Band (CB) radios. The CB radio network can be used for passing informal messages between ACT RFS vehicles, and for passing messages between ACT RFS vehicles and private vehicles, such as landowner's vehicles, when local knowledge or guidance is required.

The NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) has also endorsed the use of CB radios as a sub-tactical network and the ability to use this system in the ACT will allow for improved communications between ACT RFS vehicles and NSW RFS vehicles when working on joint operations. ACT RFS TRN radios have all NSW RFS fire ground and support channels programmed as profiles.

Operating procedure

TRN radio use

TRN is the primary radio network to be used by the ACT RFS and other emergency services.

TRN is used for:

- dispatch of all ACT RFS resources
- transmission of weather from fire towers (RFS Ops 1)
- broadcasts and communications from the ESA Communications Centre (COMCEN).

TRN channels

The following channels are allocated for the TRN:

TRN Channel	Use
RFS OPS 1	Primary radio channel for ACT RFS
FG channels	Used for incident ground communications
RFS IMT	Incident management communications
Air Ops	Used for air operations during large incidents
PLT Ops	Used for heavy plant during large incidents
ESA 1 & ESA 11 (ESA 4 & ESA 5)	Allocated channels for communications with other ESA services during incidents. First Incident
ESA 2 & ESA 12 (ESA 6 & ESA 7)	Allocated channels for communications with other ESA services during incidents. Second Incident
ESA 3 & ESA 13 (ESA 8 & ESA 9)	Allocated channels for communications with other ESA services during incidents. Third Incident

Note: For response to fires within the built-up area and where both ACT RFS and ACT Fire and Rescue are in attendance, a common TRN channel will be allocated. COMCEN will advise the responding units of the allocated channel for the incident on dispatch. The Incident Controller can request additional channels via COMCEN.

Sub-tactical radio network

The UHF CB network or TRN fire ground channels allow fire ground discussions without imposition on the TRN network. These channels can be used for routine messages where they have no effect on the operation's strategies or tactics.

Note: All important and urgent messages must be transmitted over the incident channel as determined by COMCEN or the IC. This will be on the TRN network and not the CB or fire ground channels. The incident management team and COMCEN monitor the incident channel, and appropriate action can be taken in response to messages passed over the appropriate network that cannot be taken using sub-tactical (CB) or fire ground channels.

Handling public access

In using the UHF CB system, operators need to be aware that the general public has full access to the CB radio frequencies. Therefore, some courtesy and patience may be needed for other users of the system. Such instances may be managed by moving to another channel or requesting other public users to do so.

If there are any concerns with the public interfering with fire ground communications on the CB network, the information is to be passed to the incident management team to determine a more appropriate communications plan.

Although this is a citizen band radio system, it is expected that proper communications protocol is followed by ACT RFS members whenever using the CB radio.

Channel allocation

At any incident where the TRN fire ground or CB radios are being used, the first unit on scene must inform COMCEN, the Incident Controller, sector leaders and responding units which talk around TRN or CB channel is being used.

When operating with NSW RFS, the default talk around CB channel is **UHF CB channel 15**.

Strategic communications

Both the UHF CB radio and the TRN radio must be switched on at all times when on a fire ground.

Strategic decisions from the IMT to the sectors/units, important and urgent messages from COMCEN or the IMT to the field crews, or urgent messages from the field crews back to the IMT must all be made over the TRN network. This allows the messages to be monitored by the IMT or COMCEN, and for these messages to reach all the ACT RFS vehicles assigned to an incident.

Communicating with COMCEN or IMT

TRN must be used for communications with COMCEN and the Incident Management Team (IMT). Neither COMCEN nor the IMT monitors CB radio transmissions and COMCEN does not record voice traffic passed over the CB radio.

Colour coding radio messages

All radio communications with COMCEN or the IMT must include a colour code in the message. This code will alert the radio operators, and other units monitoring the radio channels, to the priority of the message. The colour codes are as follows:

Colour	Priority	Type of message
Yellow	Low	Routine, non-incident related messages
Blue	Medium	Incident related messages
White	High	Initial reporting of an incident such as smoke from a fire tower
Red	Urgent	Immediate assistance required, threat to life or property

The unit response to a call and any subsequent exchanges in the conversation do not need a colour coding - only the message that initiates the conversation.

Red messages

Red messages require some care. Whenever COMCEN or the IMT hears a "red" message (even if not directed to them) COMCEN or the IMT will send "All units stand-by", and if the call was directed to them "go ahead [unit name] and pass your RED message".


Anyone hearing a red message should immediately cease use of the channel. You may emphasise the point when initiating a red message by saying "red, red, red". If it becomes obvious that a red message is not being heard, offer to relay the message if you can.

Document information

Version history

Author	Version	Version Approval Date	Summary of Changes
Andrew Stark	1.0	15/02/2011	SOP 5.1 Colour Coding of radio Messages SOP 5.2 Sub Tactical Radio Network SOP 5.3 TRN Radio Use
Rohan Scott	2.0	05/03/2020	Combined previous SOPs, reviewed, and updated
Steve Quinlan	2.0	27/3/2023	Administrative review
Steve Quinlan	2.0	02/02/2023	Addition of allocated Incident channels

Approved by

Name	Title/Role	Signature	Date
Rohan Scott	ACT RFS Chief Officer		08/02/2024

Document Owner

Position	Section
RFS Director	Operations

Next review due: 01/10/2026

Related documents

Document name
Emergencies Act 2004
2.2.11 Using a Mobile Data Terminal Standard Operating Procedure
2.2.13 Response Standard Operating Procedure

Signed documents will be scanned and filed in TRIM.