

Transcript: Radio Usage and Transmission Protocols (March 2024)

Welcome to this Alaska Land Mobile Radio training presentation, radio usage and transmission protocols.

ALMR policy and procedure governs the use of the ALMR system in all manners, from system management to user requirements. The specific protocol for radio usage and transmission are outlined in procedure 300-6 available on the ALMR website in the policies and procedures section. This document outlines standards and procedures for use and this training will summarize a few key requirements from that policy.

The overriding purpose for the ALMR system is interoperability with agencies at all levels during an emergency or disaster. As such, a plain language protocol has been instituted for use during multi agency responses, emergency situations, and also day-to-day operations. Compliance with the standard for daily operations is requested. It is voluntary. However, when you are dealing with multi agencies it is required to utilize plain language when speaking. Using agency specific jargon, acronyms or codes may hamper emergency response efforts and may not be understood by every responder on the scene. Utilize the procedure 300-6 for more information on the plain language protocol which incorporates the requirements of the national incident management system.

Ensure that all radio transmissions from your users are professional, concise and use the plain language protocol. This ensures that access to the system is available for every user, especially users that may have emergency traffic. All users must yield their air time to identified emergency radio traffic. In general, dispatchers will answer emergency calls or the incident Commander on scene will answer and respond to an emergency. If you are not part of that response, stay off the radio until traffic clears.

Test and exercise transmissions should be clearly announced, especially when on a live radio channel that's being used for daily operations. Make sure that your transmissions say "exercise, exercise, exercise," or test one test 2, test 3, et cetera to ensure that is clear. Make sure you utilize that at the beginning and end of your transmission as the beginning of transmissions could be cut off or somebody may not have heard the first statement. This ensures clear communication and lack of confusion for any tests or exercises.

System capacity, while expanding, is still limited in some areas. The procedure has minimize traffic protocols available should the system become overwhelmed. While this has not been an issue in the past, where these protocols have had to be implemented. If there was a large incident such as natural disaster response or other items that may create an unprecedented level of traffic on the system or in a specific area, those protocols can be initiated from the operations management and system management offices. That is based on system need and will be communicated to users if they come into effect.

The ALMR interoperable zones are a key component of the Interoperations plan for all agencies. As a condition of membership for ALMR, all agency radios must be programmed with interop zones. At a minimum, you must program the zones where your agency operates. For instance, if you are in the North region, you must at a minimum have the North zone programmed into your radio and available to users. If your radios have the appropriate programming capacity, it is requested that all interoperable zones be programmed.

Interoperable zones are based in three geographic regions of the state, SE, Alaska, Central and North. Contact the help desk or Operations Management Office if you are unsure which region your agency is in for ALMR purposes. The first channel in the interoperable zone is a call channel, and that can be communicated with the Monitoring Dispatch Center to request additional talk groups or other resources

for an incident. Keep in mind that it is encouraged that the interoperable zones be used for training and exercise operations, so all users have the proficiency of using these zones if needed in a real emergency. Coordinate with your monitoring dispatch center to receive exercise or test assignments for interoperable talk groups. Please note that the old interoperable talk group lineup, which generally started with a letter such as ABC or D, have been depreciated and are no longer functional. If your radios still have these line up of interoperable zones, they must be changed immediately.

Encryption of radio traffic is an option available to all users on the almar system. There are several different considerations for encrypting traffic, and they have both operational and system implications. If you are considering encrypting your traffic, contact the ALMR help desk for guidance. Encryption keys for any talk groups that are currently encrypted can be shared with your partners. However, there are operational programming considerations and this must be done via the talkgroup sharing agreement. That form has spaces to indicate if the encryption keys themselves should be shared. Keep in mind that encryption does not allow for as free of an interoperable communication as clear traffic in the interoperable talk groups. For that reason, encryption is never allowed on shared interoperable channels such as the central, North and SE zones. For certain law enforcement operations where encryption would be desired, there are law enforcement tactical groups where encryption can be used

ALMR is a partnership of municipal, local and federal agencies, which include Department of Defense operations. As such, the ALMR system follows all federal government guidance and regulations on information systems. Because of the sensitive nature of traffic that uses the ALMR system, there are certain security considerations that each user and agency agrees to. The system is only available for public safety, authorized use, and is subject to all federal, state and local laws and regulations. Users agree to not bypass test system security or any other steps that may cause an impact to the operations of the system. In addition, as soon as any lost or stolen equipment becomes known, that agency is responsible to notify the help desk immediately, and also will be required to file a police report that lists that stolen or lost equipment. In the appropriate databases.

Expanded information on this topic can be found in procedure 300-6 on the ALMAR website. If you have questions about this training, please don't hesitate to contact the Almar operations Management Office or the ALMR training specialist for assistance.