

# Mutual Aid Box Alarm System – Illinois Communications – MABAS BOX ALARM CARDS

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Subject: MABAS Box Alarm Cards  
Functional Area: Operations  
Category: Policy and Procedure  
Approved By: MABAS Executive Board



## PURPOSE

To help coordinate the design of MABAS Box Alarm Cards for new and existing MABAS Divisions using one standardized template containing all of the required information needed to dispatch a MABAS Box Alarm and for the MABAS Box Alarm to be easily understood by emergency personnel and telecommunicators.

## RESPONSIBILITY

This recommended practice applies to all new and existing MABAS Divisions wishing to have one template for use throughout their division that incorporates the traditional style card with recommended changes designed to make dispatching MABAS Box Alarms easier for telecommunicators and emergency service personnel.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Enforcement of this specific policy rests initially within each MABAS Division then the MABAS CEO, followed by the MABAS President, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President and 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President.

## REPORTING REQUIREMENT

There is no routine reporting requirement for this policy.

## BACKGROUND

MABAS is currently experiencing rapid growth throughout numerous locations, with many new divisions being formed. Many of these new divisions have limited internal experience to draw upon in developing box alarm cards and have requested assistance with the design process as well as a generic box alarm card in an electronic format. The MABAS Communications Committee was tasked with this responsibility at the MABAS Executive Board meeting in February 2004. The MABAS Communications Committee has developed a standard template that contains all of the required elements needed to be able to design a MABAS Card and to be able to dispatch MABAS resources easily by a primary or secondary dispatch center.

Several changes to the “**traditional style**” card have been recommended to make it easier for telecommunicators and emergency service personnel to understand and reduce the number of errors during alarm dispatch. Those changes include:

- The four-letter abbreviations for each department should be discontinued and full names are to be used. 8-point Arial Font should be the minimum size font used.
- The “**Change of Quarters**” section on the older style cards has been a source of many errors and omissions. The new style card incorporates the “**Change of Quarters**” into the top portion of the alarm response area.
- Some departments may bring “**Change of Quarters**” companies into their stations and leave them there to handle further calls in their jurisdiction, throughout all the alarms. Others departments may bring “**Change of Quarters**” companies into the stations and move them to the scene on the next level of alarm. These are both allowable alternatives.

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- **“Change of Quarters”** companies will be placed in the column for **“Change of Quarters”** and the station where they are expected to go will be placed in parenthesis. The address and directions to get to that station should be placed in the **“Information”** section.
- The new style card does not limit the number of alarms that each department can have on their card. Each division can add as many alarms, per card as desired, by adding additional rows to the card.
- It is recommended that the last level of alarm be reserved for **“Interdivisional Request”** and that level should include the **“1<sup>st</sup> CHOICE, 2<sup>nd</sup> CHOICE and 3<sup>rd</sup> CHOICE”** of which divisions to call when extra equipment is needed. (This request does not refer to, or should be confused with, the State of Illinois’ Mutual Aid Response Flow Plan.)
- The bottom of the card should be kept for addresses for the change of quarter’s stations and other pertinent information or instructions.
- The card is designed to be placed in a clear plastic sheet protector with reinforced holes and to be placed in a 3-ring binder and/or on computer. Do not punch holes in the box alarm card, as that will make it harder to read and duplicate.

## POLICY

The MABAS Telecommunications, Communications and Dispatch Committee hereby makes the following recommendations for both member and non-member fire departments:

1. Each box alarm card should include the following: The top section of the card is to include: **“Department Name, Box Alarm Type, Effective Date, MABAS Division #, Box Alarm #, Location or Area of Alarm, and Authorized Signature”**. There will be no other changes to this area.
  - 1.1 The next section is the **“Local Dispatch Area”** and will be the responsibility of the local dispatch authority. This is not a **MABAS** area and may include: **“Still, Full Still, Working Still, Automatic Aid, General Alarm, Etc.”** This area may be any number of rows that you choose for your division or department.
  - 1.2 **“Change of Quarters”** has been added to the Still Alarm areas, and may be filled in, left blank, or deleted.
  - 1.3 The Box Alarm Card is designed around a progressive structure. **It is imperative that all still alarm companies be dispatched by the local dispatch authority prior to or simultaneously with the MABAS Box Alarm request.** It is not the responsibility of the MABAS Dispatcher to dispatch companies listed on a Box Alarm Card before the Box Alarm level.
  - 1.4 The next section is the **“MABAS BOX ALARM”**. This is where MABAS dispatching starts. Column headings may include: **“Alarm Level, Engines, Tenders, Trucks, Squads, EMS, Chiefs, Special Equipment, Change of Quarters”**, or others for specialized cards and as standardized throughout a Division.
    - 1.4.1 Department names are to be spelled out and are to be in at least 8-point, Arial font.
    - 1.4.2 Card is to be read left to right. Departments are to be sent to the scene unless in the **“Change of Quarters”** area.
    - 1.4.3 In **“Change of Quarters”**, the department listed is to be sent to the fire station listed in parenthesis. The addresses should be given in the information portion of the box alarm card, or on back of the card.
    - 1.4.4 In the **“Special Equipment or Other”** column, apparatus or equipment that does not fall into the primary categories can be listed.
2. The number of alarm levels is left to the individual fire department to determine. MABAS starts at the **“Box Alarm Level”**, proceeds to the **“2<sup>nd</sup> Alarm Level, 3<sup>rd</sup> Alarm Level, 4<sup>th</sup> Alarm Level, 5<sup>th</sup> Alarm Level”**, and may continue through any number of levels that are put on the cards.

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- 2.1 The last level of alarm is reserved for “**Interdivisional Request**” and that level should include the “**1<sup>st</sup> CHOICE, 2<sup>nd</sup> CHOICE and 3<sup>rd</sup> CHOICE**” of which divisions to call when extra equipment is needed. (This request does not refer to, or should be confused with, the State of Illinois’ Mutual Aid Response Flow Plan).
3. The bottom of the card should be left for “**Special Instructions or Information**”. Included in the Special Instructions should be the addresses for the stations listed in the “**Change of Quarters**” and any other pertinent information.
4. To eliminate clutter and confusion on box alarm cards, the following information **should not** be included on the front of box alarm cards:
  - 4.1 **Telephone numbers for responding agencies.** The MABAS System is designed to use radio alerting on the “**IFERN Frequency**” (Interagency Fire Emergency Radio Network) to notify departments due to respond. This includes departments within adjacent MABAS divisions.
  - 4.2 **Area for Response District Maps.** If a department desires to include maps for the response jurisdiction, change of quarters stations locations, etc., this information may be included on the back of the box alarm card.
  - 4.3 **Shaded Areas or Color Copies.** The use of shading or color, other than black, is discouraged for various features on box alarm cards may limit the readability of the document after photocopying.
5. New cards should be sent out to all of the departments on the cards for a minimum thirty-(30) day review/approval process. They shall be stamped draft, not signed and the effective date left blank. If there is no response from a department within the 30-day period, it will be understood that the draft cards are acceptable. After the 30-day review/approval process, cards shall be formalized by the addition of the authorized signature (actual or electronic) and effective date on each card. They shall then be sent out to each department in the Division and all departments listed on the cards at least seven (7) days prior to the effective date. It is the responsibility of each department to notify and copy their dispatch center.
6. To facilitate timely and accurate requests for a MABAS Box Alarm by a stricken agency, each Department should maintain current copies of the Box Alarm Cards for their Department in all emergency response vehicles.
7. Each MABAS Division may decide on a standardized numbering system for box alarm cards for use in their division. The following numbers should be reserved by MABAS for system wide use:
  - 7.1 BOX #888, METRA/PACE BUS/Transportation Emergencies
  - 7.2 BOX #999, Weapons of Mass Destruction
8. Examples of different types of Box Alarms, using the standard format, are included as guides to completing new cards for your divisions.
9. Appendices
  - 9.1 Definitions
  - 9.2 Sample Box Alarm Cards

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## Appendix 1

### Definitions

<b>Department Name</b>	The name of the Fire Department issuing the card.
<b>Box Alarm Type</b>	The type of emergency situation covered by the card.
<b>Effective Date</b>	The date the use of the card is authorized to begin by the issuing department.
<b>MABAS Division</b>	The Division in which the Fire Department holds a membership.
<b>Box Alarm Number</b>	The number for the card designated by the Fire Department. The numbering system should be coordinated with the other members of the Division.
<b>Location or Area</b>	This can be a single location or building; a geographical portion of the departments area of response or the entire area of response.
<b>Authorized Signature</b>	The signature of the Fire Chief of the department issuing the card.
<b>Local Dispatch Area</b>	This portion of the card is intended to show the response for any units prior to the Box Alarm level. The primary responding units will be those of the local department and possibly outside departments generally using auto-aid agreements.
<b>Alarm Level</b>	This refers to the designation given by the issuing department for responses to this location prior to the Box Alarm level. This allows for the two levels prior to the Box Alarm level. The name of the alarm levels will be based on local preference. Includes the names of the departments that are committed to provide this type of equipment at the alarm level designated.
<b>Engines</b>	Based on local designations.
<b>Tenders</b>	Based on local designations.
<b>Trucks</b>	Based on local designations.
<b>Squads</b>	Based on local designations.
<b>Chiefs</b>	Can include Chief, Deputy Chief, Assistant Chief, Battalion Chief or those staff officers acceptable to the members of the Division.
<b>Special Equipment</b>	Any ancillary units, individuals or specialized apparatus that would be beneficial for the type of alarm designated by the card. These resources may or may not be owned and operated by the member departments.
<b>Change of Quarters</b>	This lists the station/s that will house units from neighboring departments. The specific units that are specified on each level will respond to other emergency calls for the duration of the original call or moved up to the scene during further alarms.
<b>MABAS Box Alarm</b>	This portion of the card is intended to show the response for any units starting at the Box Alarm level. These responses are covered by the MABAS mutual aid agreements.

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<b>Alarm Level</b>	This refers to the Box Alarm, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Alarm, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Alarm, etc. to the ultimate level deemed appropriate by the department to handle the possible emergency situations. Includes the names of the departments that are committed to provide this type of equipment at the alarm level designated.
<b>Engines</b>	Based on local designations.
<b>Tenders</b>	Based on local designations.
<b>Trucks</b>	Based on local designations.
<b>Squads</b>	Based on local designations.
<b>Chiefs</b>	Can include Chief, Deputy Chief, Assistant Chief, Battalion Chief or those staff officers acceptable to the members of the Division.
<b>Special Equipment</b>	Any ancillary units, individuals or specialized apparatus that would be beneficial for the type of alarm designated by the card. These resources may or may not be owned and operated by the member departments.
<b>Change of Quarters</b>	This lists the station/s that will house units from neighboring departments. The specific units that are specified on each level will respond to other emergency calls for the duration of the original call unless they are asked to move up to the scene.
<b>Special Instructions</b>	This area is reserved for any information that will allow the MABAS telecommunicators handling the radio communications for the incident to have quick access to specific information to assist responding units. Some of these could be the address of the change of quarter's stations, special contact numbers for key department members, and numbers for departments that are due to respond that may have special contact requirements.
<b>Interdivisional Request</b>	An Interdivisional Request is activated when all companies have been dispatched on the specific Box Alarm Card have been dispatched and additional companies are required for a large scale incident. <b>During an Interdivisional Request, speed of response is important.</b> The Division providing companies determines which departments and units respond based upon pre-determined Interdivisional or Task Force response cards. Types of Interdivisional cards may include Fire, Engine Only, Tender Only, Ambulance, Haz-Mat or Specialized Rescue.
<b>Task Force Request</b>	A Task Force Request refers to activation of MABAS assets through the State of Illinois Mutual Aid Response Flow Plan. This type of request is intended for extended duration incidents where Quality and Quantity of Response takes president over speed of response.

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## Appendix 2

### Sample Box Alarm Cards

The sample box alarm cards are provided to assist departments with the understanding of the new card format. The first card is blank and can be used as a template for a department's Box Alarm Cards.