

Mutual Aid Box Alarm System – Illinois Communications – Use of IFERN and IFERN2 Frequencies

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Subject: Use of IFERN and IFERN2 Frequencies
Functional Area: Communications
Category: Policy
Approved By: MABAS Executive Board



PURPOSE

To clarify the general policies and procedures related to the use of the Interagency Fire Emergency Radio Network (IFERN) frequency (154.2650 MHz) as well as the recently designated IFERN2 frequency (154.3025 MHz).

RESPONSIBILITY

This policy applies to all MABAS Divisions and member Departments.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Enforcement of this specific policy rests initially with the Co-Chairs of the MABAS Communications Committee, then the MABAS CEO, followed by the MABAS President, 1st Vice President and 2nd Vice President.

REPORTING REQUIREMENT

There is no routine reporting requirement for this policy.

BACKGROUND

Traditionally, the IFERN frequency has been utilized by MABAS for the dispatch and coordination of mutual aid responses to a stricken community. IFERN has also been utilized to coordinate mutual aid activities outside of a MABAS Box Alarm event between fire departments with dissimilar primary radio frequencies.

IFERN has experienced increased congestion due to the growing number of MABAS Divisions, member Fire Departments, and Box Alarm dispatches. As a result of comments addressed to the MABAS Communications Committee concerning the foregoing situations, this Policy has been developed.

POLICY

The MABAS Communications Committee hereby establishes the following policy:

1. **MABAS BOX ALARMS.** Requesting, dispatching, and response to MABAS Box Alarms are appropriate uses of the IFERN frequency. This radio traffic will include, but not necessarily be limited to:
 - 1.1 The Incident Commander, or stricken entity's dispatch authority, requesting the MABAS Box Alarm dispatch including box alarm number, level of alarm requested, location of incident, general incident information and staging area.
 - 1.2 Communications between the Incident Commander and the MABAS Division dispatch center.
 - 1.3 Coordination of responding units to the emergency scene and/or staging area.
 - 1.4 Coordination of the staging area, including communications between the Incident Commander/Operations Section Chief and Staging Officer.
 - 1.5 Routine updates, reports and/or requests for additional assistance or resources.

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- 1.6 Communications between the Incident Commander and the stricken community's local dispatch authority.
2. **CHANGE OF QUARTERS COMPANIES.** Coordination of units responding to change quarters into a stricken community is an appropriate use of the IFERN Frequency. This radio traffic will include, but not necessarily be limited to:
 - 2.1. Communications between the MABAS Division Dispatch and units responding to the stricken community for change of quarters.
 - 2.2. Communications between the change of quarters units and the stricken community's local dispatch authority to coordinate responses to additional emergencies within the community.

Note: Departments are encouraged to ensure that change of quarters companies designated on box alarm cards have local dispatch frequency capabilities to eliminate the need for using IFERN for change of quarters companies.
3. **MUTUAL AID COORDINATION.** Coordination of units responding to an emergency incident that involves one or more fire departments that utilize dissimilar primary dispatch frequencies is an appropriate use of the IFERN frequency. This may include responses involving automatic mutual aid or other similar emergencies that do not necessitate a MABAS Box Alarm.
4. **FIRE/EMS EMERGENCY CALL RELAY.** Relay of fire and/or EMS emergency incident information between Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) or fire service dispatch centers that utilize dissimilar primary dispatch frequencies. Alternate means of notification for routine mutual aid between departments is encouraged.
5. **MULTIPLE DEPARTMENT TRAINING EVENTS.** The use of IFERN, as well as the MABAS fireground tactical frequencies, is appropriate when coordinating training events that involve multiple fire departments when one or more of the fire departments utilizes a dissimilar primary radio frequency. This type of training event may also include the dispatch of a MABAS Box Alarm for response drill purposes. Response drills shall cease operations on IFERN if an actual MABAS incident occurs within the region or if requested to cease because of interference to operations in another Division.
6. **INFORMATIONAL ANNOUNCEMENTS.** The use of IFERN and/or the MABAS Alerting Tones for the purpose of wide-area dissemination of informational announcements **is not appropriate**. These types of informational announcements that are not appropriate may include, but not be limited to:
 - Severe Weather Watches and Warnings
 - Hospital Bypass, Closure or Diversion
 - Apparatus In/Out of Service or Relocation
 - AMBER Alerts
7. **RETONING BOX ALARMS.** Frequently a MABAS Box Alarm assignment includes departments from adjacent MABAS Divisions. It **is not appropriate** for multiple MABAS Divisions to activate the MABAS Alerting Tones and dispatch units to the same incident. The MABAS Division with primary mutual aid dispatch responsibility for the incident will be responsible for all dispatch and radio traffic associated with that specific MABAS Box Alarm incident. The exception to this section is for an Inter-Divisional MABAS request that is beyond the last level of the Box Alarm Card. (Please refer to C-01-04 - MABAS ALERTING/COVERAGE for additional guidance.)
8. **ALTERNATE TRAFFIC FREQUENCY.** The use of IFERN as an alternate radio frequency for local radio traffic **is not appropriate**. This would include local dispatch or response communications when the primary dispatch frequency is overburdened.
9. **IFERN2.** The frequency of 154.3025 MHz (IFERN2) has been secured for statewide use in Illinois and Wisconsin as an alternate mutual aid dispatch frequency for the MABAS organization. Uses of IFERN2 include, but are not limited to:

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- 9.1 **Disaster Response** - Command and Control at disaster scenes through the use of temporary fixed base stations and/or mobile command posts. This would include coordination of base camp operations.
- 9.2 **Wide Area Information Dissemination** - A MABAS Division may elect to construct a network of fixed base stations and alerting receivers for the purpose of timely dissemination of information to member departments. (Note: Fixed Base Stations will require FCC authorization prior to construction.) Informational messages that may be broadcast on the IFERN2 frequency include, but are not limited to:
 - Severe Weather Watches & Warnings
 - Hospital Bypass, Closure or Diversion
 - Apparatus In/Out of Service or Relocation

10. RADIO RESPONSE DRILLS. The use of IFERN for routine radio response drills is discouraged except for new MABAS Divisions performing these drills just prior to becoming active. Active Divisions may hold radio response drills, in coordination with their Division Executive Board, however not more than quarterly. Radio drills should only be conducted between 0700 to 2200 hours. Radio drills shall cease operations on IFERN if an actual MABAS incident occurs within the region or if requested to cease because of interference to operations in another Division.

CONCLUSION

This policy provides policy and direction for the use of the MABAS dispatch frequencies, IFERN (154.265 MHz) & IFERN2 (154.3025 MHz). All MABAS Divisions and member departments are encouraged to enforce the disciplined use of these frequencies as advocated herein.

(Approved by the MABAS Executive Board on June 9, 2005. Revised by the MABAS Executive Board on July 28, 2011. Revised by the MABAS Executive Board on February 24, 2022.)