

# Mutual Aid Box Alarm System – Illinois Communications – Tactical Frequency Use Guideline

Index #: C-01-05-01

Adopted: 10/18/2006

Revised: 2/24/2022

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Subject: Audible Warning at Emergency Incident Scenes  
Functional Area: Communications  
Category: Policy  
Approved By: MABAS Executive Board



## PURPOSE

To provide guidance and direction to member departments and incident commanders with regards to audible warning signals for use at incident scenes to alert personnel of impending or imminent danger.

## 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

Various procedures have been enacted by member departments and MABAS to alert personnel at emergency scenes of impending or imminent dangers including flashover, building collapse, downed power lines, missing firefighter, change from offensive to defensive operations and many other potentially dangerous events or situations. The need to coordinate audible warning sounds including the use of apparatus airhorns or audible tone encoders on command radios has become apparent. It is also recognized that an Incident Commander should also have the ability to emit an attention getting signal on fireground frequencies to warn firefighters of impending danger.

This policy does not address the use of MDC1200 or other automatic number identification protocols or the use of "emergency" buttons on mobile and portable radios.

This policy will provide uniform guidance for all MABAS member departments at both MABAS and non- MABAS incidents.

## POLICY

The MABAS Communications Committee hereby establishes the following policy:

- AIR HORNS:** The Incident Commander shall order the airhorns to sound on one or more fire apparatus at an incident scene when necessary to immediately warn all personnel working at the incident of the need to immediately evacuate the building or hot zone. Examples of when airhorns should be sounded include, but not limited to, impending collapse, flashover, explosion, hazardous atmosphere, etc. Apparatus Operators shall sound the airhorns, using a sequence of airhorn blasts that shall not exceed 10 seconds in length followed by a 10 second period of silence, and it is done 3 times. (NFPA 1500, A.8.1.11)

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2. **RADIO ALERT TONE:** When so equipped, the Incident Commander shall cause an audible alert tone to be transmitted for 3 to 5 seconds over all fireground frequencies in use. Examples for the use of the radio alerting tone include, but are not limited to:
  - 2.1 **EVACUATION:** Anytime during an incident when it is necessary to immediately evacuate a building, trench, confined space, hazardous area or other position when such evacuation is necessary to protect the safety of personnel working the incident.
  - 2.2 **DANGEROUS SITUATION:** Alerting personnel to an unusual condition or situation at the scene of an emergency that puts personnel at increased risk. These situations may include, but not be limited to, downed power line, unstable wall or structure, vicious animal, or other safety related situation or message.
  - 2.3 **PERSONNEL ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT:** To alert crews working an emergency incident of an impending Personnel Accountability Report.
  - 2.4 **EMERGENCY TRAFFIC:** To alert personnel to clear a fireground or other frequency due to a request to pass emergency traffic to the incident commander.
3. **RADIO ALERT TONE PROCEDURE:** When an Incident Commander determines that an emergency exists or a potential situation exists that adversely affects the safety of personnel working at the incident, and the Incident Commander has the capability to transmit a radio alert tone, the following process is hereby recommended.
  - 3.1 **FIREGROUND FREQUENCIES:** Starting with the primary tactical frequency (firefighters in greatest danger) the Incident Commander shall cause the Radio Alert Tone to be transmitted followed immediately by the phrase “ALL UNITS STAND BY FOR EMERGENCY TRAFFIC” followed immediately by a description of the emergency or situation.

For example, the Safety Officer determines that a structure has become unstable and the Incident Commander orders an evacuation of interior companies. The following transmission should be broadcast on each fireground channel in use at the incident:

Transmit Radio Alert Tone; announce “EMERGENCY TRAFFIC – ALL PERSONNEL EVACUATE THE BUILDING DUE TO IMPENDING COLLAPSE” (The alert tone and announcement should be repeated.)
  - 3.2 **IFERN/DISPATCH FREQUENCY:** The Incident Commander may elect to have the Dispatch Center transmit the radio alert tone and emergency traffic message over IFERN, assuming a MABAS box alarm incident is in progress, or over the local dispatch channel. The format for transmission of emergency traffic over the IFERN or local dispatch channel should follow the same procedure as described in Section 3.3.1.

## CONCLUSION

This policy provides direction for the use of audible warning tones and airhorns at the scene of an emergency incident.

*(Approved by the MABAS Executive Board on the 10/18/2006. Revised by the MABAS Executive Board on 02/24/2022.)*