

Mutual Aid Box Alarm System – Illinois Communications – Medical Helicopters

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Revised: 2/24/2022

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Subject: Medical Helicopters
Functional Area: Communications
Category: Policy
Approved By: MABAS Executive Board



PURPOSE

To recommend the use of MERCI or IREACH radio frequencies for medical helicopter landing zones.

RESPONSIBILITY

This policy applies to all MABAS member agencies. It is encouraged that all fire departments and related emergency response organizations throughout Illinois adopt the procedures set forth herein.

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

Experience has shown that the use of IFERN or Fireground Frequencies by medical helicopters is less than desirable. Helicopters landing at scenes where MABAS Box Alarm incidents are in progress can disrupt necessary communications with the MABAS Division, other responding units, staging, etc. Likewise, other incident related radio traffic can interfere with safety related transmissions between the landing zone sector and the medical helicopter.

Radio communications from medical helicopters while in flight can cover great geographic areas due to their antenna height. Helicopters responding to an incident in one jurisdiction can cause, or receive, harmful interference to/from an in-progress MABAS box alarm in another jurisdiction.

POLICY

The MABAS Communications Committee hereby establishes the following policy:

1. The use of IFERN (154.265 MHz) or RED, WHITE, BLUE, GOLD, BLACK or GRAY fireground frequencies for medical evacuation helicopter landing zones is an inappropriate use of the frequency and is strongly discouraged.
2. The use of existing VHF-MERCI or IREACH frequencies, or the 7AG88D interoperability frequency (SWIT Zone BJ) is more appropriate for landing zone or ambulance to helicopter communications.
3. For areas that use MERCI 340 (155.340 MHz) as their primary ambulance to hospital frequency, MERCI 400 (155.400 MHz) for communications with medical helicopters should be considered. (Areas south of North Avenue in the Chicago metropolitan area.)
4. For areas that use MERCI 400 (155.400 MHz) as their primary ambulance to hospital frequency, MERCI 340 (155.340 MHz) for communications with medical helicopters should be the frequency of choice. (Areas north of North Avenue in the Chicago metropolitan area.)

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5. Departments should consult with their EMS System to determine if the use of Tone Coded Squelch (PL) is desired to allow monitoring of landing zone activities by Medical Control.
6. Departments without EMS responsibilities, or departments where use of existing VHF-MERCI frequencies is undesirable for helicopter use, IREACH (155.055 MHz) should be the frequency of choice for landing zone communications.

CONCLUSION

Proper use of available radio frequencies can eliminate harmful interference between MABAS incidents and medical helicopters. Nothing in this statement is intended to discourage the use of other licensed frequencies not specified herein for use during helicopter landing zone situations.

(Approved by the MABAS Executive Board on 10/16/2002. Revised by the MABAS Executive Board on 02/24/2022.)