

Metropolitan Police Academy



2.2 Use of Police Radios

Introduction

The use of your police radio is an important part of every patrol officer's day. The police radio is your main source of contact with dispatchers and other officers. The radio is one of your most important tools and the main lifeline in volatile or hostile situations. Without an understanding of the functions of your radio, you could find yourself in a situation in which you are unable to request the backup necessary to ensure your safety.

Today you will learn departmental policy, etiquette, ten signals, and the phonetic alphabet that is used with your police radio. You will learn all the parts of your radio including how to switch between multiple radio zones and how to broadcast a flash lookout. You will also learn how to maintain your safety in situations in which your radio may not transmit, how to recognize an environment that may hinder radio transmittal, and the appropriate steps to take when arriving on such scenes.

2.2.1 Identify the radio communication zones

The Office of Unified Communications (OUC) coordinates the emergency 911 activities from the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and non-emergency city-service 311 call activity, Fire and Emergency Medical Services (FEMS), and customer service operations. The OUC is also referred to as *Communications* or *Dispatch*. OUC provides centralized, district-wide coordination and management of public safety voice radio technology and other public safety wireless communication systems and resources.

The District of Columbia is divided into seven police districts. Each of these districts operates on its own radio zone. Each radio zone has three (3) channels indicated by an "A", "B", or "C" switch on the radio.

- The main channel, "A," is the primary method of communication between MPD members and the OUC dispatchers.
- The secondary channel, "B," is known as the TAC channel and has no dispatcher. The TAC channel is used for direct communication between members of the department regarding their duties.
NOTE: Anything you say on the main channel and the TAC channel is recorded and can be played back in court.
- The third district-specific channel, "C," is the surveillance channel. This channel is not recorded, shorter in range, and used for more sensitive officer-to-officer communication.

The **City-Wide 1 (CW-1)** is the designated emergency zone. CW-1 is the last position on the radio switch on all Departmental radios.

- This zone is typically used for large-scale events when units from different parts of the city or organizational elements work together. Affected units will be directed by the dispatcher to switch to City-Wide 1 when the need arises.
- Additionally, the City-Wide 1 position can be used by officers from an organizational element that are having radio communication problems within their assigned zone. After contacting the dispatcher on City-Wide 1 and getting an acknowledgment, officers must provide a brief description of the issue and then switch back to the zone that they normally operate.

- City-Wide 1 is also used to raise crime scene officers, K-9 and other specialized units, and when operating inside the Metro transit system.
NOTE: Requests for specialized units are typically performed through the dispatcher of your assigned district (radio zone), who then notifies specialized unit personnel on the City-Wide 1 channel.

There are several other zones available on the radio, such as MPD-1, MPD-2, and MPD-3 (zones 8, 9, and 10 on the selector switch.) These zones are only to be used with authorization, as not all of the zones are encrypted and may not be a good choice for sensitive operations.

2.2.2 State the prohibited acts when using the police radio

As with every piece of technology issued by MPD, there are established rules for the use of police radios. The radio has several rules of which you need to be aware:

- Profanity, vulgarity, or any message containing insulting or abusive language is prohibited.
- The use of any language other than English is generally prohibited.
- Members must refrain from transmitting unnecessary and superfluous radio messages. Your transmissions must be limited to the information required for the assignment you are handling.
- Never transmit to interfere with another person's message on the radio.
- Never intentionally damage or permit someone else to damage radio equipment.
- Do not allow unauthorized persons to tamper with, use, or operate your police radio.
- Do not use jargon or any descriptive term that might be offensive to any person.
- Do not place or use your radio, its battery, or any other electrical equipment in contact with ammunition.
- Do not use your police radio within a one-block radius of an actual or suspected explosive device. This restriction does not apply to situations where you are searching for a possible bomb or destructive device where the use of your radio is required for safety purposes.

2.2.3 Describe the purpose of the emergency button

Each radio is equipped with an orange emergency button that, when depressed, cuts the transmissions of anyone that is speaking over the radio. It also opens the mic without pressing the transmit button for approximately ten (10) seconds. This allows an officer who is in trouble to speak into the radio without having to wait for anyone else attempting to transmit. After the emergency button is depressed, a warning tone will sound over all radios operating in that district. When this tone is heard, officers should immediately stop any non-priority activity and devote their full attention to the radio message.

The officer making the emergency transmission should remember that the most important piece of information to get across to the dispatcher and potential backup units is his or her location. All other information is secondary during a critical situation. Once your location has been clearly broadcast and the situation permits, the officer should advise the dispatcher of any additional information about the scene, to include the nature of the event, lookouts, and any injuries that may have occurred during the priority.

Once the situation is under control, you must deactivate your emergency button. To deactivate it, you must depress the emergency button again and hold it for approximately three (3) seconds. This should clear the emergency alert. If that is unsuccessful, remove the radio battery from the radio, wait three (3) to five (5) seconds and then replace the battery. The emergency alert signal should be cleared. Should you accidentally activate your emergency button, you must notify dispatch, then follow the same deactivation steps as listed above.

2.2.4 Utilize the phonetic alphabet, ten codes, and hospital codes when speaking on the radio

Phonetic Alphabet

When relaying unusual or uncommon names, places, and information to the dispatcher, you will use a phonetic alphabet to clearly communicate the information. The phonetic alphabet is as follows:

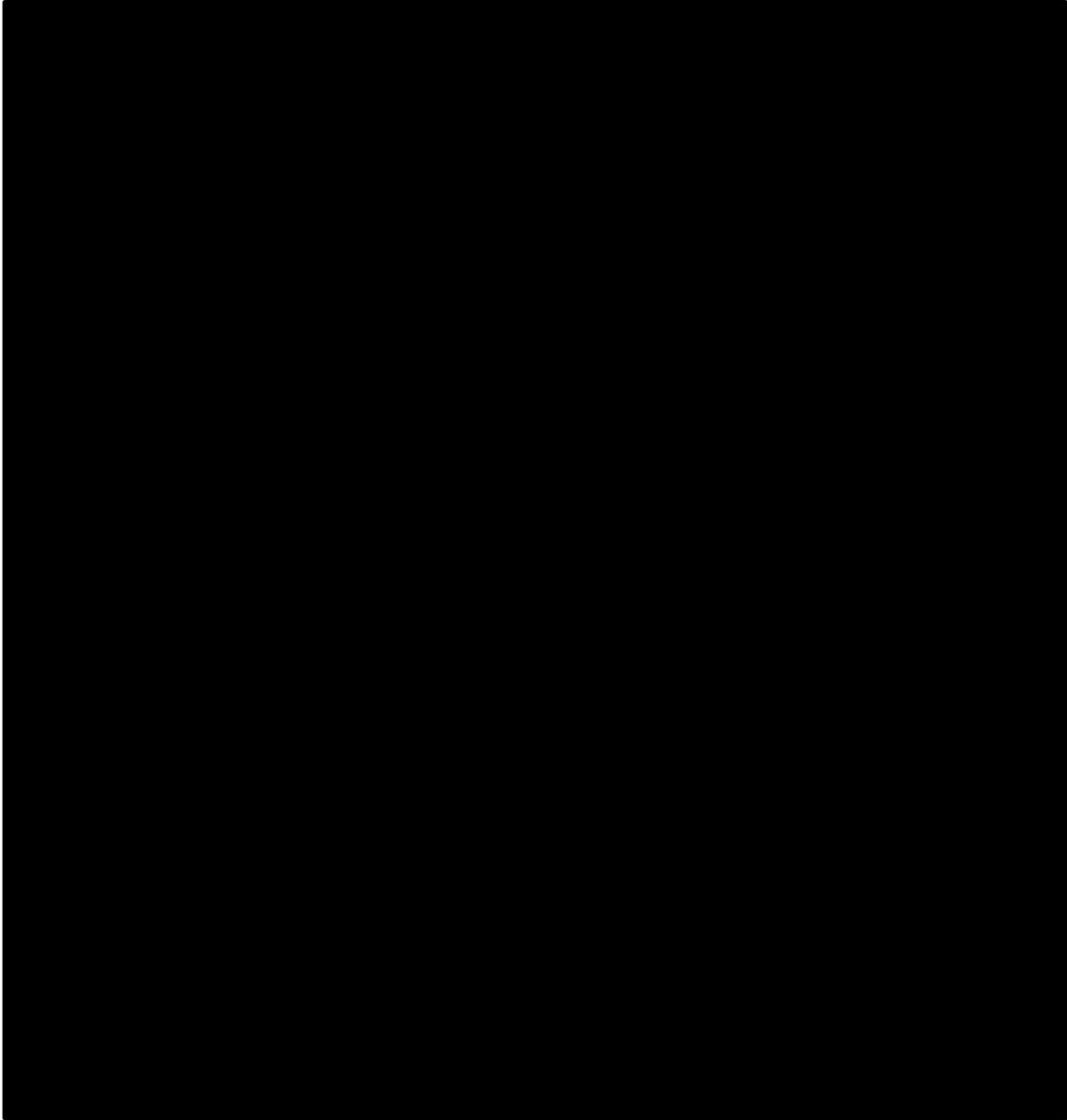
A. - ADAM	J. - JOHN	S. - SAM
B. - BROWN	K. - KING	T. - TOM
C. - CHARLES	L. - LINCOLN	U. - UNION
D. - DAVID	M. - MARY	V. - VICTOR
E. - EDWARD	N. - NORA	W. - WILLIAM
F. - FRANK	O. - OCEAN	X. - X-RAY
G. - GEORGE	P. - PAUL	Y. - YOUNG
H. - HENRY	Q. - QUEEN	Z. - ZEBRA
I. - IDA	R. - ROBERT	

Officer:	<i>"MPA30"</i>
Dispatcher:	<i>"MPA30, go ahead."</i>
Officer:	<i>"I have a name when you are ready to copy."</i>
Dispatcher:	<i>"I am ready to copy."</i>
Officer:	<i>Last name phonetically King-Ocean-Robert-Nora-Edward-George-Adam-Young." "First name of Troy common spelling... Middle name of David common spelling..."</i>

Ten Codes

Under the National Incident Management System (NIMS), many jurisdictions, including the Metropolitan Police Department, are transitioning to and using more plain language on the police radio in place of using ten signals for communications. The following ten codes nonetheless are still being used throughout the department and will be practiced here throughout your training:

Ten codes are redacted for public use.

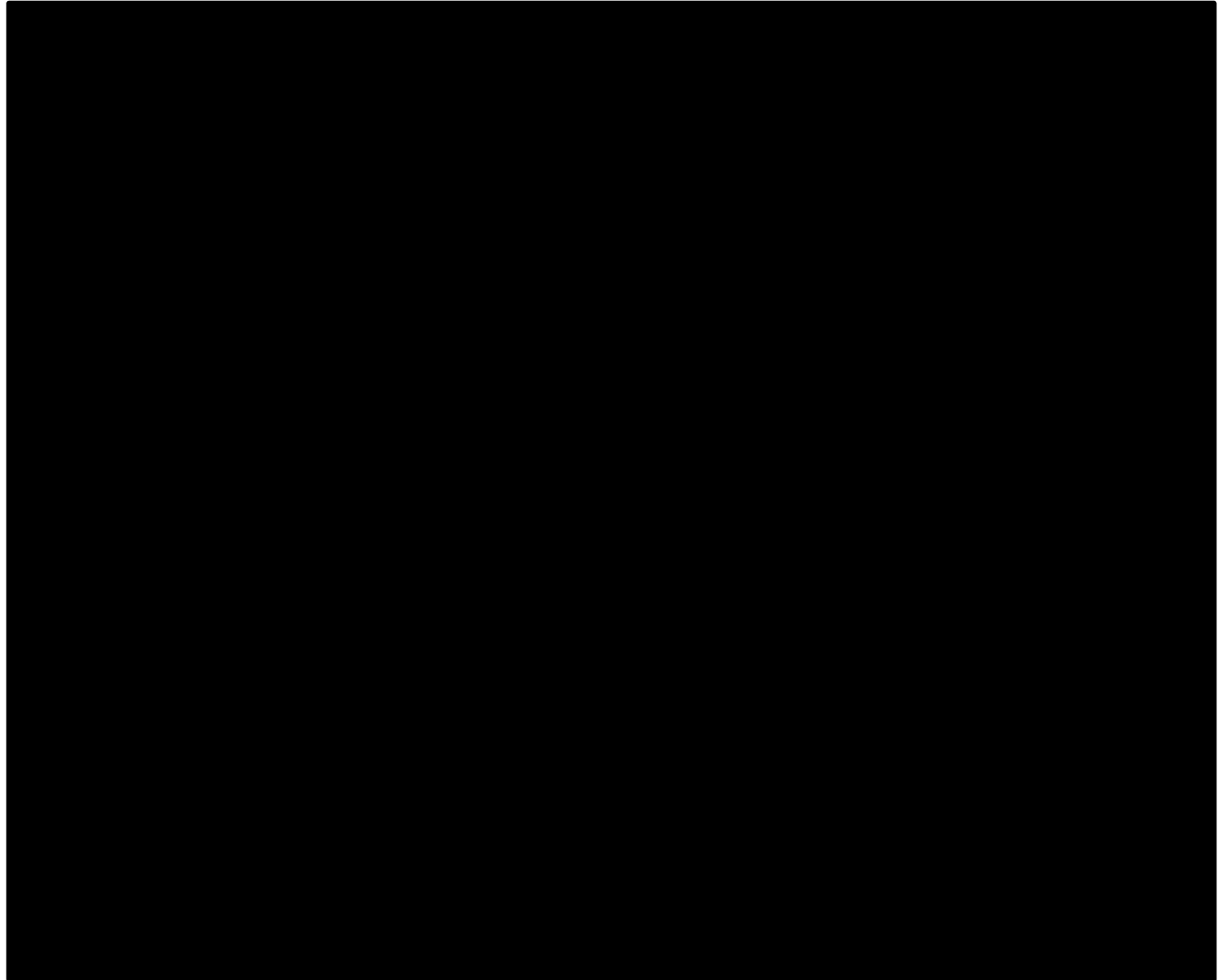


Hospital Codes

Anytime a person is transported to a hospital by DCFEMS or AMR, the dispatcher will give you a code (i.e., a number) that corresponds with whatever hospital the person was taken. There are several practical applications for this: it reduces radio transmissions and, most importantly from a law enforcement perspective, it keeps the name of the hospital off of the air where a passerby or another person could potentially hear where the patient is being taken. The same way that officers secure their radios when running a person for criminal status, officers need to be cognizant of what they are transmitting over the radio and in whose company they are making those transmissions, especially when it comes to information pertaining to hospital transports.

Below are the Hospital Codes used by DCFEMS. This information is not tested, but as an officer, you should be comfortable using and understanding what these codes mean.

Hospital Codes are redacted for public use.



2.2.5 Distinguish a flash lookout from a general broadcast

An important part of police work is the ability to relay information about a person or vehicle to other officers in the field. We relay this information in order to allow the other officers to locate the person or vehicle in question. This is known as a **lookout**. MPD divides a lookout into two parts:

- The first part is a flash lookout.
- The second part is a general broadcast.

The **flash lookout** is a preliminary description that is broadcasted *within the first five (5) minutes* of arriving on a scene. Flash lookouts are brief and provide the first information available to officers in the area so they can locate and stop the subject or vehicle in close proximity to the scene. Though policy

requires this information to be broadcast within five (5) minutes of being on scene, officers should broadcast the information as soon as they have it, *the sooner the better!*

A **general broadcast** is a more detailed lookout following an on -scene investigation. A general broadcast is given after an in-depth interview has been conducted with all involved parties and a review of immediately available information has been performed (e.g., security footage that can be easily watched). It is important to provide the most relevant details possible in the general broadcast. This lookout will be used in the report and for identification procedures if the individual or vehicle is located.

The Look Out Information form (PD106) is what the department uses to document both the flash lookout and the general broadcast. It should be noted that the PD106 is considered potentially discoverable material and shall be preserved just like your notebook.

2.2.6 Demonstrate the procedures for establishing radio contact with the dispatcher

When going into service with the dispatcher at the beginning of your shift, you should first give your call sign and wait to be acknowledged. Giving a call sign requires an officer to state the type of unit and the call sign itself (e.g., Scout Car 7101, 1MB3 [Mountain Bike in 1D], 4FS3 [Full Stride in 4D], or WAG51M [Wagon in 5D]).

When going into service, you will login with your MPD call sign using the mobile data terminal (MDT) or the mobile application on your department-issued cell phone. Call signs are standardized, and the assigned member's individual profile includes the member's certifications. Members shall ensure that their call sign is precisely entered, and their certifications are properly recorded when coming in-service.

NOTE: There may be times that you are unable to log in via the MDT or your cell phone due to technical issues, or you are on a foot beat, or your vehicle does not have an MDT. Therefore, you must know how to use your radio.

When going in service using your radio, you will first state your call sign. The dispatcher will acknowledge you by repeating your call sign back to you.

You should then provide the following information:

- Call sign
- In service ten code [REDACTED]
- The ten code for the number of officers in your unit [REDACTED]
- Your CAD ID and the CAD ID of your partner(s)
- If you are a transport or non-transport vehicle
- If you have an MDT in your vehicle and are logged in or not
- If you have specialized training or equipment (e.g., you are a certified Spanish speaker or you have an M4 in your vehicle)

Ten codes are redacted for public use.

EXAMPLE	
Officer:	"MPA30"
Dispatcher:	"MPA30."
Officer:	"MPA30 coming in service, CAD ID 1001, <div style="background-color: black; color: black;">[REDACTED]</div> MDT logged in, Tint Meter on board."

Throughout your shift, you will be raising and acknowledging the dispatcher for various different reasons and assignments. You need to remember a few things:

- Prior to entering underground structures such as Metro stations, basements, or parking lots, inform the dispatcher. Locations like these may impair radio communications.
- If you place yourself out of service for a self-initiated assignment, you need to report back to the dispatcher within ten (10) minutes.
- It is crucial that you place yourself on the scene of an assignment or, if you are handling a self-initiated assignment, you mark on the scene with the dispatcher. You do this by saying, "[Call sign] on-scene" or "[Call sign] hold me in the 4300 block of South Capitol Street SE speaking with a citizen." That way, if you need assistance the dispatcher will already have your location.
- When the dispatcher is preparing to voice a priority assignment, a distinct radio alert tone will sound. When you hear the alert tone, you should stop all but emergency activities and transmissions, and standby for dispatching of the priority assignment.
- Members must monitor the radio at all times. If you fail to acknowledge a radio run or the dispatcher, the matter will be investigated and may result in discipline.

2.2.7 Demonstrate the operation of the radio

Your issued police radio is simple to operate once you learn the function of each button and knob.

- The **volume knob** located on top of your radio is the largest of the knobs. It has a dual function: it serves as both the power and volume knob.
- The **zone selector** is next to the volume knob and surrounded by numbers and hash marks with sixteen (16) positions.
- The **channel selector** is a small toggle switch between the zone selector and volume knob that moves between positions A (main), B (TAC), and C (surveillance).
- Depending on the model of your police radio, it will be equipped with one or two **screens**. Every radio currently issued has one small screen on top and some additionally have a color screen on the front of the radio. These screens indicate which radio zone or channel the radio is tuned to. Either screen will also indicate the battery life and signal strength of the radio.
- The radio is equipped with two **microphones**, one directly above the color screen and the other directly above the speaker. They are small oval-shaped holes in the plastic casing of the radio.
- The **push-to-talk button** is located on the side of the radio. It is oval shaped with three (3) rows of five (5) dimples on it, and the button is circled by a small green oval.
- The **speaker** for the radio is on the backside, opposite the color screen.

- The **battery** is located at the base of the radio. It has a release on both sides and if you press both release buttons simultaneously, you can remove the battery from the radio.
- At the base of each battery there are four (4) **charging points**. The charging points are made of brass and if you see any visible corrosion, you should not attempt to use any type of cleaner on them. If there is visible corrosion on the battery, you should discontinue using it as the radio needs to be replaced or repaired by a MPD radio technician.
- The orange **Emergency Button**

2.2.8 Discuss the care, handling, and maintenance of the radio

The police radio is a valuable resource to the police officer. You should exercise care and caution in terms of its storage and security, as well as your accountability for and handling of it. It is of utmost importance that you realize the value of portable radios, in terms of personal safety and monetary worth. Radios shall not be left out of sight or unattended, even within police stations or in police vehicles.

As with all MPD-issued property, you are responsible for the care and maintenance of your radio. If you damage or lose it, you must immediately report it to your supervisor who will guide you in completing a Report of Damage to or Loss of District Government Property form (PD43). If it is determined that the damage or loss was due to negligence on your part, it is subject to being replaced at your personal expense and you could also face departmental discipline.

Radio batteries are to be recharged or replaced, as applicable, after every ten (10) hour shift. Batteries need to be charged for at least four (4) hours after being operated during a ten (10) hour shift. The charging base has a light that indicates the status of the battery:

- red = charging
- flashing green = 90% charged
- solid green = 100% charged
- flashing red = no longer serviceable or battery replacement is required
- solid yellow = recondition the battery. Reconditioning is usually resolved by allowing the battery to fully recharge.

Occasionally, programming updates will be pushed to the radios automatically when they connect to the network. The radio will beep and a prompt will be visible on the screen. The screen will display "Acpt" (Accept) and "Dlay" (Delay) over two of the buttons, and the user will need to make a suggestion. If the user selects "Acpt," the radio will update for approximately thirty (30) seconds. If "Dlay" is selected, the radio will update automatically the next time it is turned on, which will take an thirty (30) seconds.

Summary

The use of your police radio is an important part of every patrol officer's day. Your police radio should be treated as a lifeline and, as such, you must be familiar with proper use and radio procedures such as ten codes, hospital codes, and the phonetic alphabet. Each radio is equipped with an orange emergency button that, when depressed, cuts the transmissions of anyone that is speaking over the radio. When held for three (3) seconds, this should clear the emergency transmission. Holding the emergency button for approximately ten (10) seconds also opens the mic without pressing the transmit button. When using the emergency button, the most important piece of information is your location.