



MABAS Communications Committee

Meeting Minutes

July 19, 2004

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. at the Lisle Village Hall. Present were committee members Jerry Tonne, Lombard; Paul Maplethorpe, Round Lake; Steve Rauter, Lisle-Woodridge; Dave Riddle, Channahon; John Lozar, DuComm; Bill Bouma, Mt. Pleasant; Greg Riddle, IFCA; and Andrew Sneed, Winnebago County. Also in attendance were Tom Mefford, ITTF/DuPage County; Mitch Virin, Winnebago County and Carl Guse, WI DOT.

Advocacy Statements

Statement #8 – Technicians Guideline: General discussion about the statement. Gregg Riddle questioned listing CTCSS tone in two different statements. It was acknowledged that if tones ever change, both statements must be updated. The Technicians Statement recommends full CTCSS on the narrow-band frequencies, A date was discussed for CTCSS implementation for the wide-band frequencies. The consensus was to wait for definitive dates from the FCC. Mr. Guse discussed potential adjacent channel interference between the new narrow-band and existing wide-band frequencies. This was acknowledged and the narrow-band frequencies may only be useful for limited operation at very low power (handheld radios) until full migration to narrow-band emissions occur.

The consensus of the Committee present was to forward Advocacy Statement #8 - *Technician's Guidelines for Configuring Fire Radios* to the MABAS Executive Board for their consideration and action.

Statement #9 – Website Management: The consensus of the Committee was to forward Advocacy Statement #9 – *Guidelines for MABAS Affiliated Website Management* to the MABAS Executive Board for their consideration and action.

Website Management

D/C Rauter reported that information for posting on the MABAS website is regularly being received. The information available and usefulness of the site is increasing. He further reported that the MABASRADIO site is a good site, with thousands of “hits”.

The IL USAR site is expanding. Requests for streaming video and secured areas to report member training records are being investigated. A system for remotely placing activation pages on the website has been implemented.

Meeting Minutes

Gregg Riddle suggested that the monthly meeting minutes be formally approved before being placed on the website. The consensus was that this procedure will add legitimacy to the Committee's work and integrity.

Tactical Frequency Use Guideline

The Tactical Frequency Use Guideline distributed in May was discussed. This document was previously forwarded throughout the MABAS e-mail network. As a result, several comments were received and discussed by the Committee.

A memo from Chief Clemmensen of Palatine Rural was distributed and discussed. Chief Maplethorpe will pen a response to Chief Clemmensen's concerns. Another issue presented was the lack of RED Fireground on the Mass Casualty portion of the guideline. It was agreed to add RED and designate it for first due companies, extrication, safety and related fire service activities.

Mr. Mefford suggested that the length of the document will limit its usefulness in the field. He suggested that a frequency use matrix be added for quick reference. Chief Maplethorpe will develop the matrix.

A suggestion to add a warning statement to the guideline addressing potential interference between adjacent frequencies, especially for the new narrow-band fireground channels will be added.

Fireground frequency utilization at multiple incidents in close proximity was also addressed. Suggestions about dispatch assigning fireground frequencies were considered. However, it was determined that field personnel will have to recognize that a frequency is in use close by and assign a different frequency for their specific incident.

A lengthy discussion ensued concerning the general lack of understanding concerning the need for Incident Communications Plans, especially at larger incidents. The need for a standardized plan was stressed. It was suggested that the Communications Committee provide a training program for all Divisions addressing communications in general and the frequency use guideline.

Chief Maplethorpe will make the changes to the Recommended Frequency Use Guideline and redistribute it to the committee for review.

Statewide Radio License

Chief Maplethorpe reported that the FCC granted the MABAS statewide radio authorization on May 26, 2004. He thanked President Reardon for intervening with the FCC to move the application forward.

Advocacy Statement #7 – *Statewide Radio License* was updated with the call sign (WQAG579) and the effective date. The updated version is available on the website.

D/C Rauter suggested that a message be sent to all Divisions announcing that the statewide license has been granted and require acknowledgement from the Division that they agree to abide by the terms of Advocacy Statement #7.

Chief Riddle recommended that the Committee prepare some form of information release announcing the receipt of the statewide license. He indicated that this is proof that MABAS is working on behalf of its members and the statewide license will save many departments and Divisions considerable expense. Gregg Riddle stated he would write an article for the GONG. An e-mail release will be prepared.

St. Louis' use of IFERN

Chief Maplethorpe distributed an e-mail from Terry Weatherford (Madison County) concerning St. Louis' use of IFERN for daily fireground operations. His letter indicates that high power base stations are in use and that they interfere with MABAS operations in Illinois. D/C Rauter recommended contacting Steve Devine from the Missouri State Patrol to involve him in the issue. Chief Maplethorpe recommended discussing the issue with Chief Render at Signal Hill, since he was responsible for bringing St. Louis into MABAS through Illinois Division 32. D/C Tonne suggested a meeting be arranged in St. Louis by our Committee to meet their officials and discuss the matter. Chief Maplethorpe will contact Chief Render to arrange a meeting.

Mr. Weatherford also reported that Randolph County is using IFERN for routine daily dispatch of calls using Chester Fire Department's call sign. Chief Maplethorpe reported that St. Clair County previously reported the same activity; however they indicated the dispatch traffic only recently began. Chief Maplethorpe will follow-up.

STARCOMM 21

Mr. Mefford provided an update on ITTF's proposal to provide all public safety entities in Illinois with either a mobile or base radio for the proposed STARCOMM system. Mr. Mefford reported that funding for VHF interoperability radios has been scuttled, and that funding diverted to STARCOMM. A lengthy discussion ensued concerning the hidden costs, limited usefulness and other potential uses for the funding.

A draft copy of a letter from President Reardon was distributed concerning a survey from ITTF. Several comments were expressed concerning the technical accuracy of the letter about who would be eligible for the radios, MABAS Executive Board approval, and the overall misleading statement of support. Concerns were also raised that MABAS has officially adopted VHF frequencies for interoperability and questioned the overall usefulness of the STARCOMM radios for the majority of Fire Departments in Illinois.

The Committee discussed other communications technologies that would have a greater benefit to Illinois' fire service, including EMNet (Emergency Management Network) a satellite based secure e-mail system that is being installed in each county. EMNet could be used to distribute secured homeland security bulletins, weather alerts, AMBER alerts, EAS activations, training notices and other time sensitive, real time information to all fire departments in Illinois.

The Communications Committee unanimously recommended EMNet or other similar program for funding by ITTF instead of STARCOMM.

Mobile Command Posts

A discussion ensued concerning the draft mobile command post standard being prepared by another committee. Concerns were raised over the differences between the Type I & II command posts and communications standards for the Type III design. Of particular concern are radio frequency (rf) related interference problems common to mobile command posts. A recommendation was proposed to add a warning about rf related issues if a properly engineered antenna system is not utilized.

It was felt that several members of the Communications Committee should meet with the Mobile Command Post Committee to discuss rf related issues.

MERCI Base Stations

Chief Maplethorpe reported on discussions about a disaster coordination channel for hospital-to-hospital and incident-to-medical control communications. Officials at IMSA expressed concern over using a new narrow-band frequency due to adjacent channel interference issues. Mr. Guse reported that 155.280 MHz is utilized in Wisconsin's state plan for hospital-to-hospital and base/ mobile communications.

The issue concerning 155.280 in both states is the use of that frequency by ambulance companies, veterinarians and other groups that were previously authorized under the old Special Emergency Radio Service. Monitoring this frequency in carrier-squelch mode was difficult in the Chicago metro area due to co-channel traffic.

The Committee agreed that MERCI 280 was probably still the best option for medical disaster coordination and will recommend that this frequency be included in the new MERCI base stations being proposed by ITTF. Mr. Guse and Chief Maplethorpe will work together to recommend a standardized CTCSS tone to eliminate the co-channel interference issues when monitoring.

Old Business

Rock Island County

No report.

Division 15

Chief Riddle reported that all Division 15 departments that were utilizing 154.295 MHz (BLUE Fireground) for dispatch have relocated to a new repeater frequency. Everyone appears pleased with the relocation project and the new frequency is working out well. BLUE fireground is now clear in the southwest suburbs for tactical use.

154.280 Issues

Chief Riddle reported that he believes that New Lenox is responsible for data packet bursts on WHITE fireground. He will make an effort to contact them to resolve the issue soon.

New Business

Meeting Minutes

Gregg Riddle moved to approve the minutes of the May 17, 2004 MABAS Communications Committee as presented. Second by Chief Bouma. All AYES; motion carried.

FCC Opinion

Chief Maplethorpe reported that the FCC returned Woodford County's application for the MABAS fireground frequencies because no fixed base stations were listed for 154.280 and 154.295. A formal opinion was requested concerning the definition of "base-mobile operations" found in limitation 19 of the FCC's rules for those frequencies. An opinion was received back from the FCC that stated mobile only operations are permitted, that the limitation was stated as such to prohibit point-to-point base station operations. Woodford County's application was subsequently approved.

Adjournment

Chief Riddle moved to adjourn the meeting. Second by Chief Bouma. All AYES; the meeting adjourned at 12:35 p.m.

The next meeting for the MABAS Communications Committee is scheduled for Monday, August 16, 2004 at 1000 hours. **The location of the meeting will be at the Lisle Village Hall, behind Station 1, at 925 Burlington.** Please mark your calendars.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Maplethorpe

Paul Maplethorpe
Co-Chair