SDN Communications Operations Plan

Introduction

This document outlines the Search Dog Network Communications Plan. Contained herein are the specifics of the SDN radio network structure, channel plan, communications procedures, reporting requirements, and standard data formats.

Interoperability

The SDN radio network is configured to work within the Texas Interoperability Channel Plan. All communications are to be conducted in accordance with National Incident Management System standard operating procedures. Refer to the current the current State of Texas Interoperability Channel Plan at http://tsiec.region49.org/MOU+TSICP.pdf for specifics.

Structure

SDN uses UHF radio as the primary means of voice communication and cellular telephones for backup.

Handheld radios are programmed as indicated in Attachment 1. The search team manager or designee will identify a primary and secondary channel for all SDN events and deployments to be briefed before teams deploy. The primary channel is for operations traffic and emergency communications. The secondary channel is used to expand the network, as a backup to the primary, or as a talkaround channel. A talkaround channel is generally for non-critical communications or extended transmissions that would otherwise tie-up the primary.

The size and structure of the radio network at any given event or incident is based on the mission parameters, available hardware, and the requirements of the authority having jurisdiction. The Search Team Manager may elect to operate a separate network or integrate into the local radio system if practical. SDN also has the ability to utilize a repeater to expand the range and power of the radio network. The ICS 205 in attachment 2 details SDN's standard communications plan.

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Cellular telephones are the second means of communication in the event the radio network is inoperable, unreliable, or inappropriate. Base will maintain a current list of deployed member telephone numbers on the ICS 211. See attachment 3 for a current example.

Communications Protocol

Keeping with SDN's professional image all members are to maintain proper radio etiquette at all times. Basic rules of radio etiquette include:

- Keep your radio with you at all times
- Speak in plan English – no 10 codes or jargon
- Use phonetic alphabet when appropriate
- Be *brief* when transmitting
- Avoid inadvertently "keying" your microphone
- Ensure the channel is clear before transmitting
- Do not shout into the microphone
- FEEL FREE TO ADD TO THIS LIST

Identifiers

SDN uses two methods to identify teams and personnel deployed in the field. When a canine team is deployed the team is identified by the name of the canine assigned to the team. For example, the canine handler and flanker deployed with canine Buddy are collectively known as "Team Buddy" during the search. The canine team designation remains unchanged as assignments are completed and members reassigned. Different search assignments completed during an operational period are identified by the canine team and order of assignment received. If Team Noggin completed three search assignments base will document them as "Noggin 01", "Noggin 02", and "Noggin 03".

Base will assign teams deployed without a canine identifiers based on the phonetic alphabet starting with Alpha. Additional teams are designated Bravo, Charlie, and so on. Assignments are documented in the same manner as canine team assignments, i.e. Alpha 01, Alpha 02, Alpha 03, etc.

Members of SDN are also assigned individual radio numbers for use when identification of an individual is required. Refer to attachment 4 for a list of current member radio number assignments.

In order to maintain clear communications begin transmissions with the call sign of the receiving party followed by the transmitting party's identification. For example, when a member from team Retta is contacting base, he/she should begin the transmission, "Base, this is Team Retta". Base then acknowledges the transmission with "go ahead", "standby", or other appropriate response.

Communications Checks

Maintaining contact with units in the field is a vital component to an effective search strategy and integral to personnel safety. All teams deploying to the field should conduct a radio function test (comm check) before departing base. To conduct a comm check ensure your radio is powered on and set to the proper channel. Key the radio and request a check with, "Base, this is team Maggie, request comm

check". Base should respond if the transmission is clear. If the test fails, check your equipment and repeat the test until positive contact is established. Teams must not deploy without positive conformation of communications capability.

Training & Troubleshooting

Include radio basics, repeater setup instructions, batteries, placement on pack, do's and don'ts, maintenance, factors that affect transmission, etc

Reporting

Transmissions should be kept to mission essential information and emergency traffic only. Teams should report information that may have a significant impact on search operations or personnel safety to base outside. Such reports may include location of clues, notable terrain or weather information, extended break periods (30 minutes or more), completion of or request for new assignment, and other information that may affect search strategy. Teams should also contact base upon reaching their assigned search area to verify communications are still operable.

Base Communications

To the extent practical base or command should take a proactive approach to communicating with deployed teams. Major changes in search status, weather updates, and new information should be sent to the teams when available. This active approach removes the burden of communication from the teams freeing resources to concentrate on their assignments.

When teams base must capture several pieces of information to build a complete picture of the search. This information includes, but is not limited to time of contact, location, condition, and status.

Personnel Accountability Report (PAR)

In order to maintain accountability of personnel and canines SDN utilizes the Personnel Accountability Report (PAR). While the conditions of a given search may change, SDN normally requires team PARs every 60 minutes. Base will initiate PAR checks.

To report an accurate PAR, a team leader must have visual contact will all members of his/her team. When reporting PAR, the team should give their current location, personnel status, , and percentage of assigned area complete. Base will document PARs on the incident 214.

If a team is unable to reach base for a scheduled PAR that team should attempt to establish contact within the next 30 minutes. There are several techniques teams may try to reestablish contact such as replacing radio batteries, moving to higher ground, establish line of sight with base, relay transmissions through another team, or use an alternate technology (cell phone).

If the team is unable to establish communications during this 30 minute period they should return to base immediately. Continue attempts to reestablish communications while enroute to base.

After two hours since last contact, base will dispatch a response team to the team's last know location and attempt to locate them. The SDN Search Team Manager will decide on the appropriate course of action to locate missing teams.

Sensitive Information

The cooperative nature of most searches normally results in a large number of people in and around the base of operations. Individuals may represent partner agencies, law enforcement, members of the media, and even the subject's family and friends. Accordingly, members should take every precaution to prevent the release of sensitive information. The most common types of sensitive information involve location of the subject or critical evidence. While there are various methods that may be used the most common are securing the radio network, use of alternate technologies, and personal delivery.

If transmitting sensitive information via radio members should secure the network before transmission. To initiate the process the transmitting party announces "Secure the net" over the primary radio channel. Following the announcement, members should immediately lower radio volume or switch to an earbud/headphone connection. If necessary, step away from large groups of people to limit the possibility of inadvertent release of the information. Personnel in the BoO may politely ask those not critical to operations to step outside. After a few moments to allow teams time to make the appropriate adjustments base will indicate the channel is secure and request transmission.

Members may elect to use a different means of transmission if securing the radio network is impractical. If base is unable to secure the radio network, simply request the reporting party contact a member of base over the phone or via text message. Do not relay telephone numbers over the radio network unless absolutely necessary. Keep in mind that the SDN radio network utilizes public frequencies and anyone with a radio scanner may be listening.

If all else fails, the search team may dispatch runners or return to base to deliver the information in person.

Coordinate Systems & Datums

SDN will utilize the United States National Grid (USNG) system whenever possible. USNG is the standard national coordinate system for search and rescue. This allows different agencies to report the same location via the same system eliminating inaccuracies common to other coordinate systems.

The most common datum associate with USNG is the North American Datum of 1983 (NAD83). Coordinated expressed using this system result in locations very similar to those using the World Geodetic System of 1984 (WGS84). Conversely, coordinates using NAD27, another common datum, may plot anywhere from 20 to 60 meters away from those using NAD83. This is commonly referred to as a datum shift and can result in inaccurate reporting. Include the datum appropriate for the mission in the team briefing.

Appendices

Attachment 1: Standard SDN Radio Channel Plan

Attachment 2: ICS 205, Standard SDN Communications Plan

Attachment 3: ICS 211 (as of XX/XX/XXXX)

Attachment 4: SDN Member Radio Numbers