
Unit 3: The Communications Unit

STUDENT GUIDE

Objectives

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- Describe the function and components of the Communications Unit and qualification process for the Communications Unit Leader.
- Identify positions within the Communications Unit.
- Describe responsibilities of positions within the Communications Unit.

Methodology

This unit uses lecture and discussion based activities.

Knowledge of unit content will be evaluated through administration of the final exam (to be administered upon completion of the course). Instructors will evaluate students' initial understanding through facilitation of Exercise 3.

The purpose of this unit is to provide students with an orientation to the Communications Unit.

Time Plan

A suggested time plan for this unit is shown below. More or less time may be required, based on the experience level of the group.

Topic	Time
Lesson	30 minutes
Total Time	30 minutes

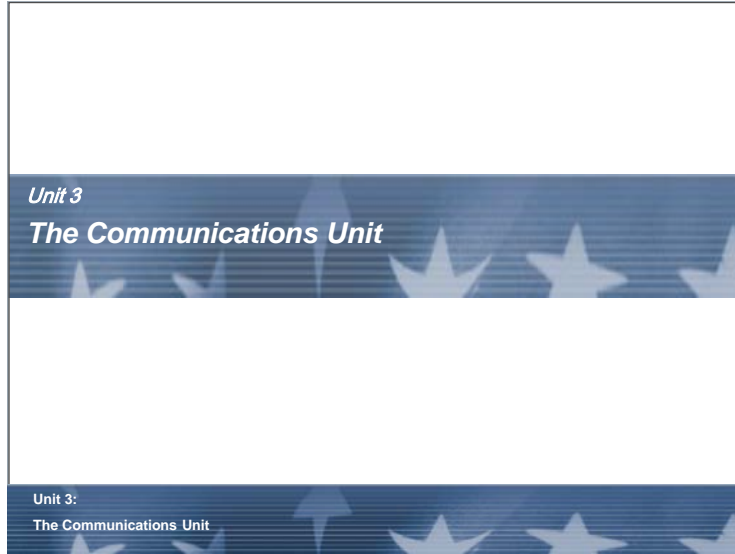
Reference Materials

- Projector & other equipment as necessary for PowerPoint presentation
- Easel chart/Easel pad
- Marking pens

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Topic

Unit Title Slide



Key Points

Topic**Unit Terminal Objective**

**Key Points**

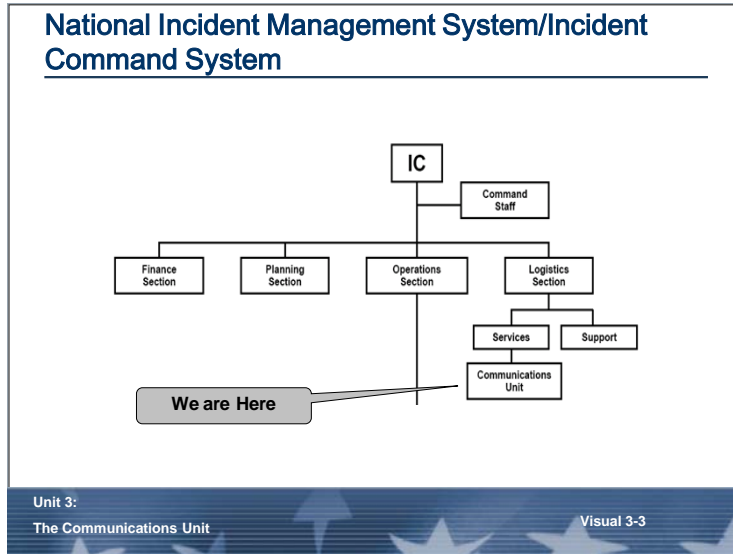
Unit Terminal Objective:

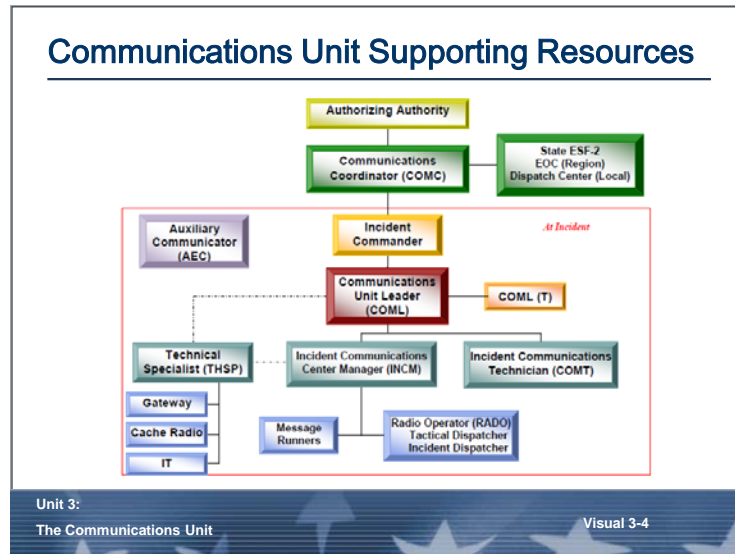
- At the end of this unit, students will be able to describe the function and components of the Communications Unit.

Unit Enabling Objectives:

- Identify positions within the Communications Unit.
- Describe responsibilities of positions within the Communications Unit.

TopicNational Incident Management System/Incident Command System

**Key Points**

Topic Communications Unit Supporting Resources**Key Points**

The communications POC/CDO/COMC helps with:

- Equipment assignments
- Frequency assignments (repeaters, links, aircraft, tactical)
- Status of orders (preorders, equipment, when ordered, ETA, etc.)
- Adjacent incident information (interoperability issues, frequency assignments, incident locations, contact information)
- Equipment availability (pre-positioned, cache location, shortages)
- Verifying incident location
- Identifying if communications coordination assistance is available

The Communications Unit



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Visual 3-5

Key Points

Topic Communications Unit Personnel

Communications Unit Personnel

- Incident Communications Technician (COMT)
- Incident Communications Manager (INCM)
- Radio Operator (RADO)
- Technical Specialists
- Message Runner
- AuxComm/NGOs



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Visual 3-6

Key Points

To help fulfill all the responsibilities of the Communications Unit, a fully-staffed Communications Unit will feature a number of personnel in a variety of roles. Not all positions must be used on every incident, but the COML may choose from:

- Incident Communications Technician (COMT) - Installs and troubleshoots communications equipment
- Incident Communications Manager (INCM) - Manages an Incident Communications Center, when having the COML do so would present span-of-control issues
- Radio Operator (RADO) - Staffs the ICC, using radios to receive information and relay messages
- Auxiliary Emergency Communicator (AEC) – This unofficial ICS position supports the operational and technical aspects of the Auxiliary Communications Unit, maintains and/or operates the AEC network. The knowledge to perform this function applies to every AEC position.
- Technical Specialist - Catch-all term for outside specialists providing expertise to the COML
- Message Runner - Physically relays messages to areas not yet served with any communications system

Topic**Communications Unit Leader**

Communications Unit Leader

- Plans and manages the technical and operational aspects of the communications function during an incident or event
- Prepares Incident Radio Communications Plan (ICS 205)
- Establishes Incident Communications Center (ICC)
- Orders and manages personnel, equipment
- Establishes needed capabilities
- Participates in incident action planning



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Visual 3-7

Key Points

The COML is responsible for a number of tasks, including:

- Planning and managing the technical and operational aspects of the communications function during an incident or event
- Preparing an Incident Radio Communications Plan (ICS Form 205)
- Establishing an Incident Communications Center (ICC)
- Ordering and managing personnel, equipment
- Establishing needed capabilities
- Participating in incident action planning

TopicCommunications Unit Leader

Communications Unit Leader (COML)

Duties: As with any ICS position, the COML is responsible for the duties of unfilled subordinate positions (INCM, COMT, THSP, RADO/Tactical Dispatcher) until delegated.



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Visual 3-8

Key Points

The COML is responsible for completing the duties of any organizationally subordinate task he or she has not delegated. Even after delegated, the COML maintains responsibility for overseeing the work of his/her subordinates.

When a unit leader does not delegate duties, he/she assumes them.

TopicIncident Communications Center Manager (INCM)

Incident Communications Center Manager (INCM)

Duties:

- Manage the operational aspects of the Communications Unit
- Supervise Radio Operators
- Assists the COML in establishing and maintaining the Incident Communications Center (ICC)



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Visual 3-9

Key Points

TopicIncident Communications Technician (COMT)

Incident Communications Technician (COMT)

The COMT is responsible for supporting the technical activities of the Communications Unit. For example:

- Radio/system coverage
- Radio programming
- Maintenance and repair
- Gateway management
- Cache management



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Visual 3-10

Key Points

TopicIncident Communications Technician (COMT)

Incident Communications Technician (COMT)

Duties: Provides for the technical implementation of incident communications systems:

- Provides for equipment distribution
- Tracks equipment
- Trains users on use of equipment
- Verifies proper programming of equipment for incident
- Assist COML in the development of the ICS 205, Incident Radio Communications Plan

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Visual 3-11

Key Points

The COMT is responsible for duties that include:

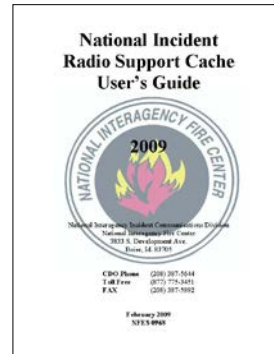
- Provides for equipment distribution
- Tracks equipment
- Trains users on use of equipment
- Verifies proper programming of equipment for incident
- Assists COML in the development of the ICS Form 205, Incident Radio Communications Plan

Topic

Incident Communications Technician

Incident Communications Technician (COMT)

Similarly, an NWCG-qualified COMT is responsible for deploying radio cache assets specifically belonging to the National Interagency Incident Communications Division (NIICD) at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho.



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Visual 3-12

Key Points

RADO

A RADO staffs a radio operator's position at the ICC and is responsible for documenting all radio and telephone messages.



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Visual 3-13

Key Points

TopicIncident Dispatchers and Tactical Dispatchers

Incident Dispatchers and Tactical Dispatchers

Some local agencies have trained public safety dispatchers to work in the field at the incident scene as Incident and/or Tactical Dispatchers who can bring additional training and experience to the ICC.



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Visual 3-14

Key Points

As part of completing your Mobilization Guide, determine what local resources are available to you. If Incident Dispatch Teams are not available locally they are available through EMAC (Emergency Management Assistance Compact). Just like with any resource, you will need to be specific in your request that you want Incident Dispatchers and go through the proper channels.

Topic Technical Specialist (THSP)

Technical Specialists (THSP)

THSP is a “catch-all” position that allows for the formal incorporation of personnel who may not be “qualified” in a specific NIMS/ICS position. For example:

- Information Technology (IT) Specialist
- Local Agency Radio Technicians (not qualified as a COMT)
- Telephone Technicians
- Interoperability Gateway Specialist
- Mobile Communications Center Specialist
- Cache Radio Specialist
- GIS Specialist



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Visual 3-15

Key Points

Any amateur resources need to be trained and they need to be disaster service workers (covers for insurance purposes).

Topic

Auxiliary Emergency Coordinator (AEC)

Auxiliary Emergency Communicator (AEC)

- This unofficial ICS position supports the operational and technical aspects of the Auxiliary Communications Team
- Maintains and/or operates the AEC network
- Staffs the AEC center
- The knowledge to perform this function applies to every AEC position



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Key Points

This unofficial ICS position supports the operational and technical aspects of the Auxiliary Communications Unit, maintains and/or operates the AEC network. The knowledge to perform this function applies to every AEC position.

TopicAuxiliary Emergency Communications (AuxComm)

Auxiliary Emergency Communications (AuxComm)

- OEC has developed a new course aimed at the volunteer emergency coordinator (i.e. amateur radio, REACT, MARS, ARES, RACES, SATERN)
- This is a 2-day (20 hour) course on how volunteer communicators can play an important role in a NIMS/ICS environment
- Emphasis is placed on AuxComm's relationship with the COML
- Public Safety Professionals and Emergency Managers are encouraged to seek out this free resource...prior to your next event

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Key Points

TopicAuxComm (cont.)

AuxComm (cont.)

- AuxComm volunteers are usually Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) on:
 - Antennas
 - Repeaters
 - Propagation
 - Station set-up
 - HF, VHF, and UHF

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Key Points

TopicPlain Language

Plain Language

Plain language: Common terms and definitions that can be understood by individuals from all responder disciplines. The intent of plain language is to ensure the clear and accurate communication of information during an incident.

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Key Points

Topic**Common Terminology**

Common Terminology

Common Terminology

- Is an ICS wide fundamental
- Necessary for operations, planning, and standard operating procedures (SOPs)
- A common dialect for describing the “who, what, when, where, why, and how” of operations
- Common terminology requires a standardized dictionary of terms and terminology

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Visual 3-17

Key Points

Topic

Common Terminology

Common Terminology

ICS establishes common terminology that allows diverse incident management and support organizations to work together across a wide variety of incident management functions and hazard scenarios.

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Visual 3-18

Key Points

Organizational Functions: Major functions and functional units with incident management responsibilities are named and defined. Terminology for the organizational elements is standard and consistent.

Resource Descriptions: Major resources—including personnel, facilities, and major equipment and supply items—that support incident management activities are given common names and are “typed” with respect to their capabilities, to help avoid confusion and to enhance interoperability.

Incident Facilities: Common terminology is used to designate the facilities in the vicinity of the incident area that will be used during the course of the incident.

Technology solutions by themselves are not sufficient to fully address communication interoperability problems in a given local government, state, or multi-state region. State and local officials consider a standard database of interoperable communications frequencies to be essential to frequency planning and coordination for interoperability frequencies and for general public safety purposes. Police and fire departments often have different concepts and doctrines on how to operate an incident command post and use interoperable communications. Similarly, first responders, such as police and fire departments, may use different terminology to describe the same thing. Differences in terminology and operating procedures can lead to communications problems even where the participating public safety agencies share common communications equipment and spectrum. State and local officials have drawn specific attention to problems caused by the lack of common terminology in naming the same interoperability frequency (GAO 04-1057T pg 9).

Topic

Common Terminology (con't)

Common Terminology (cont.)

Not all Common Terminology has the same meaning. For example, the term “cover” has several meanings.

- If you told a fire fighter to cover they would take their fire engine and go to another station
- If you told a police officer to cover they would back up another officer
- If you told a Marine to cover they would lay down 50 cal. suppressive gun fire

Unit 3:

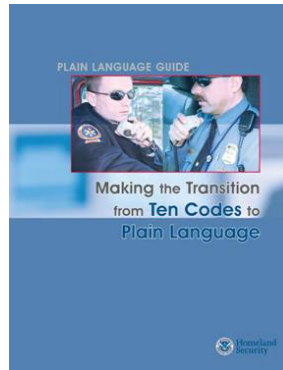
The Communications Unit

Visual 3-19

Key Points

TopicSAFECOM Plain Language Guide

SAFECOM Plain Language Guide



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Visual 3-20

Key Points

Topic**Objectives Review**

Objectives Review

1. *What are the positions within the Communications Unit?*
2. *What are the responsibilities of positions within the Communications Unit?*

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Visual 3-27

Key Points

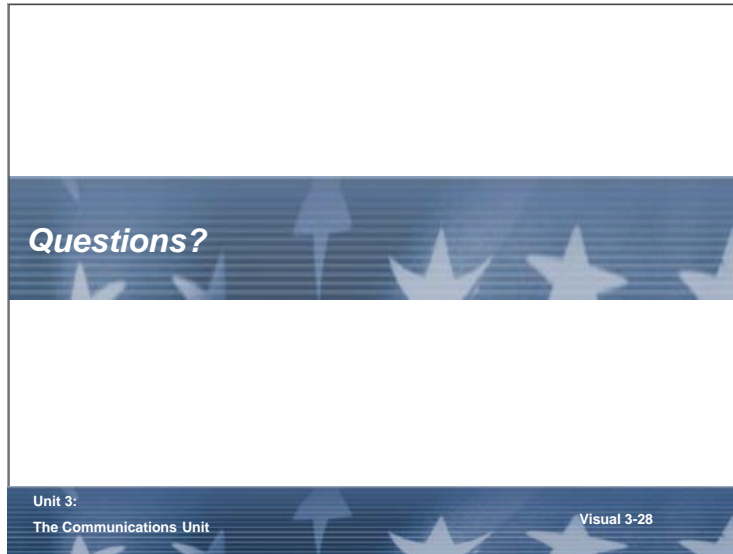
Unit Terminal Objective:

- At the end of this unit, students will be able to describe the function and components of the Communications Unit.

Unit Enabling Objectives:

- Identify positions within the Communications Unit.
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Topic**Questions**

**Key Points**
