

Four Skills for Better Radio Communications (excerpts)



Product News

with Robert Avsec

Retired battalion chief, Chesterfield, Virginia – 26 years.

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Single-most versatile piece of equipment because portable radios are the primary means for:

- All responders to begin becoming informed and educated about the incident once the first firefighter or officer arrives on the scene;
- The incident commander to execute command and control activities;
- Officers and firefighters deployed to tactical assignments in the hazard area to communicate their observations and progress to the IC and to receive updated orders; and
- Personnel in the hazard area back to talk to the IC should there be a Mayday event.

Know your hardware

- Your life may one day depend upon knowing which button or knob on your portable radio to use —
- Practice often using your radio's different features while wearing firefighting gloves
- Take advantage of operating manuals to build your body of knowledge about your radio.
- Replace a battery when it no longer holds a charge for the recommended length of time.
- Carbon particles from smoke, dirty water, sheetrock dust and other fireground goo can quickly compromise radio functions. Keep it clean.
- Keep remote mic contacts shiny for maximum performance.

Basic radio practices

- Before speaking, formulate what information is being communicated and put the information in a standardized reporting template.
- Often, ICs are overwhelmed by excess information on the radio. If face-to-face communication is possible between members of a crew and the information is not needed by the IC, don't get on the radio.
- Minimize microphone exposure by practicing shield, move and talk — shield the microphone using your hand, the bill of your helmet or your turnout coat; move away from the source of exposure, even if you can only turn your back to the source; talk directly into the microphone as much as possible, and keep the microphone 1 to 2 inches away from your mouth. If you do not have a speaking diaphragm or voice port on your facepiece, position the microphone against your lower jawbone on the skirt of the facepiece.
- When speaking into a microphone use a loud, clear and controlled voice — avoid shouting.

Hearing aid

- Keep the remote mic in close proximity to your ear.
- Foam earplugs can reduce the level of high-frequency noise.
- You need to recognize technical problems and take corrective action to improve communications. If you cannot communicate with the incident commander, it's an accountability and safety issue. Get it fixed or get out.

Radio position

- The optimal position for a portable radio transmission is at head height with the antenna in a vertical position.
- Place your radio in the radio pocket of your turnout coat while you're crawling along the floor and the radio's antenna is far from its optimal transmitting position and some of the transmitted energy is absorbed by your body.
- Left unprotected, the radio may fail to operate when you most need it.
- Radio cases with shoulder straps provide little protection and are an entanglement hazard when worn on the exterior of turnouts.