



Jeffrey R. Gahler,  
Sheriff

# HARFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY

## Communications Procedures

<b>Distribution:</b>	<b>All Employees</b>	<b>Policy Number:</b>	<b>ADM 0102</b>		
<b>Responsible Unit:</b>	<b>Police Operations Bureau</b>	<b>Rescinds:</b>	<i>MAN5100 dated 04/09</i>		
<b>Original Issued Date:</b>	<b>10/03/22</b>	<b>Revision #:</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Latest Revision Date:</b>	<b>09/25/24</b>
<b>Latest Required Review was Completed:</b>	<b>04/01/24</b>	<b>Next Review Due:</b>	<b>04/01/27</b>		

### 1. Purpose

To establish guidelines and procedures for the use of Agency radios, mobile data computers (MDC) and automatic vehicle locators (AVL) in a manner that reflects professionalism and enhances deputy safety.

### 2. Policy

All Harford County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) employees will use communication equipment (radios, MDCs, and AVLs) in a manner that conforms to this policy.

### 3. Procedures

#### A. Radio Procedures

1. The procedures in this policy are being implemented to ensure that HCSO conforms to national standards that require the use of plain language.
2. HCSO is in a time of transition, and it is understood that it will take time to stop using communication procedures that have been in effect for many years.
3. While it is expected that personnel will use 10-codes on occasion, all personnel should make a conscious effort to conform to these procedures.
4. Radio communications conducted by the Harford County Department of Emergency Services (DES) Dispatch with members of the HCSO and other public safety agencies within Harford County will consist of a combination, select miscellaneous codes, and plain English. See Appendix A.
5. Radio transmissions will be clear, concise and for official business only.

#### B. Plain Language

1. HCSO does not use a 10-code system for radio communications, all transmissions will be in plain language unless otherwise specified.
2. Plain language will help ensure that all agencies can communicate effectively during a multijurisdictional incident or if different agencies communicate on the same radio channel.
3. Plain language that is used should be clear and concise (e.g., "Call Southern" rather than "can you contact Southern public service." "On-duty" rather than "beginning tour of duty").

C. Radio Identifiers

1. HCSO personnel will be identified over the radio while working based on their assignments as noted in the Radio Identifier spreadsheet located in the shared "S" drive.

a. Supervisory Units working patrol will utilize Alpha (1st), Baker (2nd), Charlie (3rd) to designate which shift/precinct they are assigned to. The "X" is the shift, with the "Y" being their shift numeric assignment.

- |               |     |     |               |                            |
|---------------|-----|-----|---------------|----------------------------|
| i. Southern   | 1XY | 1A6 | (1 Alpha 6)   | Southern Midnight Corporal |
| ii. Central   | 2XY | 2B3 | (2 Baker 3)   | Central Dayshift Sergeant  |
| iii. Northern | 3XY | 3C1 | (3 Charlie 1) | Northern 4-12 Lieutenant   |

b. Specialized units will identify based on their assignments within those units (e.g., 4101, 4304, etc.).

- |                             |      |
|-----------------------------|------|
| i. Special Operations       | 4000 |
| ii. Court Services          | 5000 |
| iii. Community Services     | 6000 |
| iv. Criminal Investigations | 7000 |
| v. Detention Center         | 8000 |
| vi. Reserved for future     | 9000 |

c. Units coming on duty for a Patrol shift will advise on Sheriff 4 via their Sam # or static IDs that they are "On Duty" for shift.

- i. Dispatch will then provide their assignment with respective talk group based on the schedule. (e.g., Sam # dispatch "On Duty", dispatch Sam # you are post XX).
- ii. Units working where they login to an MDC will call "On Duty" on Sheriff 4 to confirm Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) is accurate. (e.g., CSU/Civil/etc.).
- iii. Those with static IDs that do not utilize an MDC will call "On Duty" on Sheriff 4 and advise Dispatch which talk group they will be operating on.

d. Units working events or details (e.g., Farm Fair, Overtime, Secondary).

- i. Patrol units (non-static) working overtime/details will use Sam # to call "On Duty".
- ii. Units assigned a Static ID # will utilize that when calling in service. (e.g., K92 "On Duty" for shift, 4104 "On Duty" for traffic post at xx, 1 Alpha 6 "On Duty" for Applefest).

e. Patrol Units, who are off duty, will notify Dispatch via "Sam # Ocean" while operating an Agency vehicle following end of detail.

- i. Those assigned a Static ID # based on their position will be "ID # Ocean". (e.g., 4101 Ocean, 4304 Ocean).
- f. Units operating specialty vehicles with static IDs will notify Dispatch.
  - i. "S #/ ID # "On Duty" in Motor 1" and will now identify as Motor 1 for duration of operating that unit for the detail. (e.g., Marine 1, Motor 2).
  - ii. When using (TRV/Command Bus/Patrol Support Vehicle/Wagon/etc.) units will verbalize that you are in the unit to track, but you will retain your identifier. (e.g., SRT 9 to dispatch I have the TRV and enroute).
- g. "D" – "Delta" will be reserved for Admin positions at the precinct. (e.g., 1 Delta 1 is the Southern Precinct Administrative Lieutenant).

#### D. Bomb Threat

1. When units respond to a call for service utmost care should be taken to limit broadcast near the suspected device to include vehicle, mobile, phone, etc.
2. Safe distance should be maintained based on best practices to include positioning of vehicle.
3. Radio and/or phone should be used away from device for notification purposes.

#### E. Talk Groups

1. Agency members will primarily utilize radio talk groups accordingly to the precinct area as assigned, (i.e., Southern Sheriff 1, Central Sheriff 2, Northern Sheriff 3).
2. Personnel assigned to the Criminal Investigations Division (CID will operate on the talk group where the incident occurred.) This will provide all units involved with the incident the ability to track new developments and respond accordingly.
3. Personnel assigned to the Special Investigations Division (SID)/Harford County Task Force will primarily utilize talk group LE3 14C, however this talk group is not monitored by Dispatch.
4. Talk group Records will be designated as the primary talk group for Central Records. Talk group Sheriff 4 is where all unit's call "On Duty".
  - a. This talk group will also be utilized as the Service Talk Group (for multiple driver's license, registration, wanted/stolen checks, lengthy messages, etc.).
5. The Inter-Agency Processing Center (IPC) and Harford County Detention Center Transportation Units, which can be accessed via the Records talk group.
6. With Supervisory approval, calls for service requiring the sole use of a talk group for an extended period of time and may be used for specialty details (warrant sweeps, sobriety checkpoints, etc.).
7. All other units/divisions will generally operate on the talk group for the precinct area where they are assigned, or where they are responding to an incident.

8. Personnel from the Aberdeen, Bel Air and Havre de Grace Police Departments, as well as the Maryland State Police will utilize their designated talk group. Multi-Agency responses will be on one talk group.
  9. Law enforcement personnel are authorized to monitor Fire/EMS communications. If the need arises for law enforcement and Fire/EMS personnel to directly communicate, a request will be made to Dispatch, at which time all involved parties will be directed by Dispatch to switch and operate on one of the FD/PD talk groups.
  10. It will be the responsibility of the deputy to inform Dispatch if he is switching to an alternate talk group and to advise when he has returned to his primary talk group.
  11. Agency members requesting to use a Special Events Talk Group will coordinate with a Dispatch Shift Lead as far in advance as possible to ensure there are no conflicts with the use of the talk group and that adequate DES personnel are available to monitor the dispatch function.
    - a. The DES Emergency Management Event Approval Form located in PowerDMS under Documents/Emergency Response, should be used during these events.
- F. Off duty
1. Dispatch will be notified when any official action is taken by off-duty members while in their Agency vehicles.
  2. Agency members will not utilize portable Agency radios while traveling in their personal vehicles unless they become involved in an incident that requires that the member take official action.
- G. **Hold the Air**
1. An incident that is determined by the dispatcher or any HCSO personnel to be an emergency, a pursuit, or a situation where officer safety is at risk or human life is in peril. The incident requires the sole use of the talk group by the unit(s) involved.
  2. A **hold the air** order will require that the DES control all radio traffic.
    - a. **"Hold the air for <unit> or "Hold the air for units at <Location>" if there are multiple units.**
    - b. **Request from the field should be "Sam 1326 to Dispatch, hold the air."**
    - c. **The channel marker will be placed unless otherwise requested on "hold the air incidents."**
    - d. **Once the situation has resolved the channel marker will be removed and an announcement will be made stating "Dispatch all units, hold the air on <talk group> has been lifted."**
  3. All HCSO personnel not involved with the incident requiring a **hold the air** on their primary talk group should switch and operate off the other primary talk group.
    - a. Example: Sheriff 1 **hold the air** - goes to Sheriff 2. Sheriff 2 goes to Sheriff 3. Sheriff 3 goes to 2.
    - b. If two channels have a **hold the air** switch to the one that doesn't.

- c. If all channels have a **hold the air** Dispatch will advise which channel to switch to.
- d. A **hold the air** order will remain in effect until canceled by the dispatcher, at which time normal radio traffic may resume.
- e. When the **hold the air** is lifted, all units should switch back and operate on their primary talk group.
- f. When a **hold the air** is placed on a talk group, a slight tone will be heard every 10 seconds indicating the **hold the air** is in effect.
- g. If determined to be an officer safety issue the tone can be dropped upon request.
- h. When a member has been away from the radio for a period of time, he or she should wait at least 10 seconds before transmitting to ensure a **hold the air** is not in effect.
- i. During situations where there is a **hold the air** on Northern/Central/Southern Talk groups, all remaining units not involved with these incident(s) will switch to the Sheriff 4 Talk Group or as advised and proceed with normal operations.
- j. Incidents of long duration or that consume a large amount of airtime may be moved to a tactical talk group at the discretion of the duty officer, supervisor, and/or the police dispatch supervisor.
- k. Dispatch has the discretion to advise a short time limit (from immediate to five minutes) from the time of the request to make personnel adjustments in the police pod and ensure that there are sufficient radio operators available to handle the traffic. The dispatch supervisor has the discretion to collapse talk groups to manage the situation.

#### H. Attempts to Locate

- 1. Major incidents will be simulcast countywide. Units responding are to switch and operate on the identified talk group at the time of dispatch.
- 2. Dispatchers on the remaining talk groups will advise units as quickly as possible.
- 3. All lookouts relating to major incidents and crimes in progress that could possibly encompass multiple precincts/agencies will be simulcast.
- 4. Certain broadcasts, "Be on the Look Out" (BOLOs), will be eligible for a countywide broadcast to include the talk groups of the Maryland State Police, Aberdeen, Bel Air, and Havre de Grace Police Departments.
- 5. For serious incidents the call will be simulcast to the appropriate units and a countywide broadcast. Countywide broadcasts will be preceded by an alert tone.
  - a. Eligible calls include in progress felonies, and serious injury hit and run accidents. Descriptions of persons involved in felonies are also eligible for countywide broadcast.
- 6. All BOLO are broadcast, at a minimum, Agency wide.

I. Emergency Call

1. The Emergency Call feature allows the radio user the ability to send a silent emergency alarm to Dispatch by depressing the designated emergency button on the radio. Dispatch is alerted both audibly and visually.
  - a. MDC, Portable radio, and In-car radio are included in this.
2. Once the emergency feature is activated the system grants that radio System Priority Assignment.
3. In instances of radio emergency actions, the activating device will have a 10-second open mic (hot mic) The permits the activating officer to speak hands free and be heard by all monitoring personnel.
4. Use of the Emergency Call feature will be restricted to critical incidents that require immediate transmissions or to signal a member needs emergency assistance.
5. When an emergency alarm is received from a unit, Dispatch will attempt to contact the unit as follows, "Dispatch to "unit number/Post Car #/S #/Ocean #", check your display and advise".
6. This allows Dispatch to acknowledge the alarm without alerting person(s) in close proximity of the deputy.
7. If the deputy acknowledges, he will be asked to advise of the situation.
8. Backup units will be dispatched if needed to the location based on CAD or GPS.

J. Radio Codes

1. HCSO will maintain an acceptable ten code substitution list, as well as a common terminology list on PowerDMS, and in APPENDIX A.
2. The following codes or plain language remain acceptable.
  - i. Signal 13 or help for officer needs assistance/ emergency.
3. The phonetic alphabet should be used only when necessary to provide accurate information (e.g., when relaying a vehicle tag number) or to assist in correctly spelling a name or word that is not readily apparent.
4. It is acceptable to spell a word without using the phonetic alphabet.
5. The phonetic alphabet should not be used for words or names that are commonly known and easily understood.
6. The phrase "common spelling," should not be used.
7. The following alphabet is acceptable for radio communications when necessary.

A-Adam	J-John	S-Sam
B-Boy	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	

1. The Public Safety Radio system makes it possible for multiple agencies to speak directly to the HCSO and other allied agencies within Harford County and across the state. The following Agency prefixes will be utilized by all agencies within Harford County:

A - Aberdeen Police Department
B - Bel Air Police Department
F - Fire Service
H - Havre De Grace Police Department
MSP Barrack designator will be MSP based
Dispatch is DES

2. When communicating outside the county, units will utilize "Harford County XYZ to allied county" and await acknowledgement. (e.g., "Harford County 1 Baker 12 (1B12) to Baltimore County".

K. Mobile Data Computers (MDC)

1. Users of MDCs are subject to all guidelines and procedures as set forth in the HCSO policy ADM 1101 Acceptable Computer Usage.
2. At the beginning of each tour of duty the user will lock the MDC into the docking station and log on.
3. At the conclusion of each tour of duty the user will erase all unnecessary messages prior to logging off, then remove and secure the MDC in a safe indoors location. The user will log off the system prior to turning off power to the MDC.
4. Any physical damage to the MDC will be immediately reported to the member's supervisor and a Supervisor's Incident Report will be completed. The MDC and a copy of the report will then be forwarded to the MDC Coordinator for repair.
5. Prior to the vehicle being left at a service facility (First Vehicle Services, body shop, etc.) the MDC will be removed and secured.
6. Members utilizing pool vehicles are required to complete the Pool Vehicle Sign-Out Log (SO-106).
7. In the event an assigned Agency vehicle is being utilized by a member other than the regularly assigned operator, the MDC will be left with the vehicle. The borrowing member will use only the MDC assigned to the vehicle while operating the vehicle and will sign on in the same manner as they would if using his own assigned MDC.

8. Members who have been assigned a new or replacement vehicle will forward an e-mail message as soon as practical to the MDC Coordinator containing the following information:
  - a. Member's name;
  - b. ID#;
  - c. Old Vehicle #;
  - d. New Vehicle #;
  - e. MDC Serial #; and
  - f. MDC Asset #.
9. Failure or malfunction of the MDC will be reported by the user to Dispatch the user's supervisor and the MDC coordinator immediately.
10. All messages transmitted over the MDC will be for official purposes only and are to be professional in nature and content at all times.
11. Messaging will be kept to a minimum, must be related to public safety, and should not contain matters of a personal nature or personal opinion.
12. Records of all MDC messages are maintained and will be reviewed monthly by the Northern Precinct Division Commander for compliance. MDC messages are official records and are subject to subpoena and/or requests made under the Maryland Public Information Act.
13. MDC's provide dispatch, complaint, and message information regarding calls for service. When necessary, voice dispatch may accompany the call for service.
14. Calls for service will be dispatched utilizing the following guidelines:
  - a. Priority 1, 2 & 3 Calls – Full Dispatch; or
  - b. Priority 4-9 Calls – Abbreviated Dispatch (call type, unit, address, and hazards if applicable).
  - c. Priority 4 – 6 Calls will be abbreviated units are expected to review full call details via MDC.
15. Calls for service will be acknowledged by utilizing the following keys:
  - a. Enroute - to acknowledge dispatch of call;
  - b. Arrived - upon arrival at scene; and
  - c. Close - For Primary Unit to clear ALL calls (NOTE: "Status Change", then "Clear" for all other units clearing the call).
16. Vehicle Status will be maintained by using the Status Change function key, followed by the Change Code drop down menu.



17. Deputy initiated calls (in-progress, just occurred or of a violent nature), to include traffic stops or warrant service attempts, will be transmitted via voice communication to Dispatch.
18. All other Deputy initiated calls (e.g., patrol checks, summons service, etc.) will be transmitted via both the MDC and voice communications. (Example: "Sam 999 Dispatch, I have placed myself on a summons service at 500 Meadowood Drive").

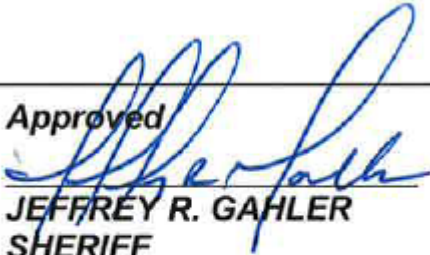
L. Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL)

1. The AVL system will be utilized in the interest of furthering the safety of Agency members and the efficient deployment of personnel during unusual occurrences and routine day-to-day operations.
2. The AVL feature identifies vehicles and radios in proximity to emergency calls for service, allowing the closest unit to be dispatched and assume control of an incident until arrival of the unit assigned to the call.
3. The AVL is active when the vehicle ignition is in the "on" position or the radio is on for radios equipped with AVL.
4. Dispatch will verify that the AVL is operational when the unit is placed "On Duty".
5. Any attempt to tamper with or disable the AVL is prohibited.
6. Members who are operating an Agency vehicle while off-duty will respond if requested by Dispatch. NOTE: Off-duty members are not obligated to engage in any official activity if the action jeopardizes civilian passengers. Members will notify Dispatch immediately so another unit can be dispatched (refer to Agency policy ADM 0601 Agency Vehicles).
7. The AVL will not be used for routine monitoring of personnel by supervisors or dispatchers. Supervisors must be able to justify the request and obtain prior approval from the Shift or Division Commander.
8. The AVL may be used to locate an Agency vehicle if there is credible evidence that the vehicle operator may be in danger or distress.
9. All requests for vehicle location information will be forwarded to the Dispatch Shift Lead. An "Administrative Event" will be created in the CAD to track each request.

**4. Summary of Changes**

- A. On 4/01/24 various revisions were made throughout the policy to ensure that HCSO conforms to the national standard that require the use of plain language.
- B. On 8/23/24 the following changes were made at the request of Special Operations Division:
  1. The terminology "Stop Transmitting / Clear Channel" was changed to "Hold the Air" throughout the document;
  2. The following additions were made to Section 3.G.2:
    - a. "Hold the air for <unit> or "Hold the air for units at <Location>" if there are multiple units.

- b. Request from the field should be "Sam 1326 to Dispatch, hold the air."
- c. The channel marker will be placed unless otherwise requested on "hold the air incidents."
- d. Once the situation has resolved the channel marker will be removed and an announcement will be made stating "Dispatch all units, hold the air on <talk group> has been lifted."

Approved  
  
JEFFREY R. GAHLER  
SHERIFF  
DATE 9.25.24

Appendix A:

## Ten Code Substitution/ Common Terminology

10-0	Caution
10-1	Unable to copy.
10-2	Signal Good
10-3	Hold the Air
10-4	Direct/ Ok
10-5	Relay
10-6	Hold me out, Busy.
10-7	Out-Of Service
10-8	Available
10-9	Repeat/Again
10-10	Fight in Progress
10-12	Stand By (stop)
10-16	Domestic
10-19	Return To ...
10-20	Location
10-21	Contact.....
10-22	Disregard /Cancel
10-23	Arrived/ At location.
10-25	Respond to.....
10-27	License Check
10-28	Plate Check

10-29 Check for Wanted/Warrants  
Full Check also if includes Plate or License Check  
10-32 Armed  
10-33 Emergency/Non-Emergency  
10-37 Suspicious Vehicle/Person  
10-41 On Duty  
10-42 Off Duty  
10-43 Information  
10-46 Assist Motorist  
10-50 MVA/ MVC (PD, PI, or PED)  
10-51 Start a tow (next on the list/owners req)  
10-52 Start EMS  
10-55 DUI  
10-56 intoxicated subject  
10-57 Hit & Run Accident (PD, PI, PED)  
10-61 In the Area  
10-63 Copy/ Direct  
10-68 Go Ahead  
10-69 Direct/ Message Received  
10-74 Negative/ No  
10-76 En route to ...  
10-77 ETA  
10-80 In Pursuit  
10-81 Intoximeter Operator  
10-83 School Crossing....  
10-89 bomb threat  
10-90 Alarm at ...  
10-92 Parking Violation  
10-95 In custody  
10-96 Mental Health  
10-97 Radio Check  
10-99 Possible Wanted/Stolen Indicated  
CODE 100 (Deleted): Stationary Patrol phase one or two.  
CODE 222- (Deleted) use active assailant.

Code to retain.

SIGNAL 13: OFFICER NEEDS ASSISTANCE or HELP

Identifying sides of structures, Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, in a clockwise rotation.

Identifying floors of a structure, Ground Floor is always Division 1, second floor division 2, and so on.... Basements, subdivision 1, and so on.

Exposure buildings- (An Exposure is any building or structure that is adjacent to the primary incident address.) Using a row of townhomes as an example, the first structure left of the primary building is Bravo Exposure 1, then 2, and so on. The first structure to the right is Delta Exposure 1, and so on.

Clinical Priority Levels

\*Deputies are not required to prioritize patients but should have an idea of the terminology and its meaning.\*

Priority 1 — Critically ill or injured person requiring immediate attention; unstable patients with potentially life-threatening injury or illness.

Priority 2 — Less serious condition, requiring emergency medical attention but not immediately endangering the patient's life.

Priority 3 — Non-emergent condition, requiring medical attention but not on an emergency basis.

Priority 4 — Deceased.