

**SAN MARCOS POLICE DEPARTMENT
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL**

Section Title: Communications

General Order: 400

Date Issued: January 17, 2004

Date Revised: January 1, 2006

Effective Date: January 14, 2006

Issuing Authority: *Howard E. Williams*
Howard E. Williams, Chief of Police

I. POLICY

Communication in the operation of a department is a vital element of law enforcement. The Communications Section is a 24-hour operation designed to provide a measure of safety and security to police personnel and to the public. Employees are reminded that radio transmissions are recorded and often monitored by the public we protect. It is imperative that everyone conducts him/herself as a professional when using the communications system. It is important that every step in any police communication process, from receiving the initial request for service to transmitting the messages be conducted concisely, effectively and properly.

II. PURPOSE

The purpose of General Order 400 is to specify Department guidelines for the proper use of communication equipment and for proper radio procedure.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. CAD – Computer Aided Dispatch. The dispatch software and hardware system.
- B. ECO – Emergency Communications Operator
- C. FCC – Federal Communications Commission.
- D. MDC – Mobile Data Computer. The laptop computers in patrol vehicles.
- E. NCIC – National Crime Information Center
- F. NLETS – National Law Enforcement Telecommunication System
- G. TCIC – Texas Crime Information Center
- H. TLETS – Texas Law Enforcement Telecommunications System

IV. COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT

- A. The Records/Communications Division Manager is responsible for the continued maintenance on emergency communications equipment operated by the Communications Section.
- B. All employees are responsible for portable communications equipment (vehicle and hand held) issued to them.

V. RADIO TRANSMISSIONS

- A. Employees will comply with FCC regulations relating to the use of radio communications systems.
- B. Employees will follow established guidelines and procedures as outlined below:
 - 1. Communications involving the protection of life and property shall be afforded priority.
 - 2. False calls, false or fraudulent distress signals, unnecessary and unidentified communications, and the transmission of unassigned call signals are specifically prohibited.
 - 3. Employees shall monitor the frequency on which they intend to transmit for a sufficient period to ensure that their transmissions will not cause interference to others.
 - 4. Duration of radio transmissions must be restricted to the minimum practical transmission time.
 - 5. Emotions such as anger, humor and excitement must be controlled.
 - 6. Only English will be spoken.
 - 7. Clear, concise and controlled language will be used.
 - 8. Obscene, indecent, profane or slang language, horseplay and joking are not permitted.
 - 9. Units calling the station shall identify themselves by their assigned unit number, and should not continue the transmission until acknowledged by the ECO.
 - 10. Units will give their unit number and, when appropriate, their approximate location when responding to the ECO.
 - 11. Officers will not call for another employee by name unless their radio or unit number is unknown.
 - 12. Officers will advise the ECO of their arrival on the scene of a dispatched call using proper radio codes.
 - 13. A "Code Four" will be broadcast when it is determined that no other units are needed.
 - 14. If an incident is found to have occurred somewhere other than at the dispatched location, the officer will advise the ECO of the need for correction in CAD.
 - 15. Upon completion of a call, officers will clear the call in the proper manner via radio or MDC and immediately go back in service.
 - 16. Lengthy transmissions should not be made on the radio system's primary channels. Long transmissions should be done over a secondary channel when available, as a CAD message, or via a cell phone if available.
 - 17. Employees will not become engaged in an argument on the radio. Conflict between an officer and an ECO should be referred to the employee's immediate supervisor for resolution.

18. Officers shall refrain from seeking advice from an ECO regarding a point of law, enforcement action, or Department policy. Officers should consult their immediate supervisor on these matters or obtain the information from their laptop computers.

VI. EMERGENCY TRANSMISSIONS

- A. Transmissions regarding emergencies (e.g., high-speed pursuits, serious crimes in progress, etc.) will be given priority over all other transmissions. Units not involved in the emergency will stay off the air until the situation has been resolved.
- B. When an officer declares an emergency, Communications will make a general broadcast to units. All employees, except the officer declaring the emergency, will stay off the primary channel until the situation is resolved.

VII. SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Supervisors will carefully monitor and supervise the use of the radio to assist their officers as needed.
- B. Supervisors are responsible for the radio conduct of their subordinates and should immediately correct improper radio procedures.
- C. Supervisors may be assigned calls when other units are not available.

VIII. CAD/MDC USAGE

- A. The MDC is a part of the radio system using frequencies licensed by the FCC. Rules concerning proper radio procedures also apply to use of the MDC. Additionally, messages:
 1. Will not be personal in nature;
 2. Will not contain derogatory references to other agencies; and
 3. Will not contain any text a reasonable person would find offensive.
- B. Because messages sent with the CAD/MDC system slow the system's response time, only concise work-related messages may be transmitted. Personnel may use abbreviations to help keep the messages brief.
- C. There is NO EXPECTATION of privacy concerning sending or receiving messages via the CAD/MDC system. All messages can be retrieved, and all messages are subject to disclosure under public records laws.

IX. REQUESTING RECORDED TRANSMISSIONS

Any employee with a legitimate need to hear or copy the radio or telephone log recording may do so by making a written request to the Records/Communication Division Manager.

X. GENERAL BROADCASTS AND ASSIGNMENTS OF CALLS FOR SERVICE

- A. During the last quarter of the calendar year, the Records/Communications Manager will direct that call priority classifications be reviewed and any adjustments made as needed. The revised list of prioritizations becomes effective as of January the next year and will be issued to all personnel as a special order.

- B. Assignment of Priority Calls
 - 1. Units Available/Units Not Available
 - a. Calls for service shall be assigned to the in-service officer responsible for the district in which the call is located. When district officers are not available, the nearest district officer will be selected. Officer safety and call priority will be the first consideration when selecting alternate district/sector officers.
 - b. Supervisors will monitor dispatching of Priority One calls and ensure that officers are, or quickly become, available to respond.
 - 2. Backup Units
 - a. Backups are assigned to ensure officer safety, to help secure crime scenes, and to check the area for suspects. Most calls categorized as priority 1 will require a backup.
 - b. The decision to send a backup on a priority 2 call is decided on a call-by-call basis. However, supervisors or on-scene officers may authorize the response of additional units if needed.
- C. General broadcasts can be used for DWI's, auto theft information, warrant information, missing persons, serious weather, and to alert officers of a pending call.

XI. TCIC/NCIC

- A. The Department maintains a teletype system to handle department business and to interface with state and federal criminal justice information systems. Employees must strictly adhere to the TLETS/NLETS and TCIC/NCIC guidelines, including any training requirements.
- B. Requests to Send Teletype Messages
 - 1. If an officer needs to send a teletype, the officer will provide an ECO with the information to be sent.
 - 2. The ECO may change the body of the text, without changing the message content, to conform with TLETS guidelines.
- C. Criminal History Information
 - 1. Patrol officers should route requests for criminal history checks to Communications.
 - 2. Criminal history information, other than what is necessary to effect an identification or to ensure officer or public safety, will not be broadcast.
 - a. Under Section 411.085 of the Texas Government Code, it is a Class B misdemeanor (or second degree felony if done for remuneration) to unlawfully disseminate criminal history information.
 - b. Personnel will comply with Department policy regarding open records when dealing with criminal history requests.