

EMS Arrival at Structure Fires?

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Discussion topic for the day, inspired by the latest comments in the [Apex Fire & EMS thread](#). We've heard from EMS readers that they appreciate a patient status as soon as possible from first-arriving fire units. Among other things, they can cut back to a cold response. Does the reverse apply from firefighters, for EMS units first-arriving at structure fires? Is even a minimal size-up helpful, for incoming companies and chief officers? Obviously, all agency operating procedures apply in this discussion. What say you?

I've tried cancelling fire or downgrading to a cold response. It doesn't work. I just assumed that once the siren came on, the only thing that could turn it off was the "on-scene" button on the status head. :)

[rfburns] - 03/10/10 - 09:14

Burns, that's because we're too quick!!

As far as from the fire side of things, had a fire two weeks ago where EMS arrived first. They gave a quick size-up of "heavy smoke showing". Good enough for us (and indeed, it was that heavy, low hanging smoke) and they didn't park in the way which was even better (he,he)!!

Silver - 03/10/10 - 11:49

The way I was taught, was that if we (EMS) beat the FD into a structure fire (not often), was to give a scene size-up, and get the crap out of the way.

"Central, Medic 1 on the scene, one-story commercial structure, smoke showing from B and C sides of the building and the roof. Medic 1 will be staging at (pick a corner that's close, but not in the way)."

And then I do get the crap out of the way.

CJS ([Email](#)) - 03/10/10 - 12:50

Now if you can teach PD officers to get the crap out of the way, then you will have done something!

sd - 03/10/10 - 12:57

AMEN!! And/or to stay with their car versus locking it up as it blocks the road (and us).

Silver - 03/10/10 - 13:20

I will qualify my earlier statements and agree with CJS and silver that a trained EMS unit can give a good size up and helpful information. Just my preference whether riding the bus or the engine, I think it is more tactful for EMS to give a size-up not outside of their fire experience level and let the first in officer or another officer with the primary fire agency respond to the size-up however they feel nessecary. If I hear someone who I have worked with a lot on EMS and has a good knowledge of what we do on the fire side check on scene with nothing showing, I would probably consider making a decision at that point. However, if I heard someone with a bad track record or someone with less respected knowledge of the fire side, I would wait until I arrived. It's really case by case I think, but I don't think it is a best practice for EMS to say "cancel all fire units" etc...that's really not their call to make in most departments/systems/situations...yes they can provide accurate, useful information but not to the point to make the call. On the flip side, fire responding to medical should be the same...I don't think fire should say "cancel EMS" unless there is obviously no patient, in which case I would still recommend just passing on the information and let the responding unit/officer make that decision. Either way each situation is different and a good working relationship is key to learning each system and person to make the outcome better.

rookie - 03/10/10 - 13:32

HEY NOW!!! I resemble that remark (well, not me specifically).

Most of the officers I work with have been "taught" how to respond with RFD on fires. Unfortunately, a "check in with fire, reference working fire" call more than likely not means a fun little T39 response and when they do get there, they want to be "part of the action". They get there

and do a GREAT job at blocking the road....but don't think about other units that have not made it on scene yet. Of course, usually were we block the road, we can't see anything so they lock up and walk towards the fire.

What I try to teach them is that you need to block the road appropriately; use your car to block "MOST" of the road but leave room for a FIRE TRUCK to get by (not a smart car). Then, STAY AT YOUR POST!!! That is why we are called to assist (traffic control). Not to block the road and then stand around watching the fire like you want to roast a hot dog.

Now here is a question for you fire and ems folks. When it comes to multi agency response there is a PS Tac channel assigned. What are your thoughts on police switching over to that channel to coordinate their response? Police do not talk on the radio the same way fire and ems do. Also, we do not use ICS on scenes so that could cause for some confusion in reference to radio traffic, who's in charge, etc. Finally, when it comes to actually using the radio itself, 99.99% of officers aren't familiar with changing zones to get to the right channel. We are used to using a variety of channels in the same zone so having to switch zones is a BIG pain in the..... for some people. Can ECC Patch our (police) OPS channel to the PS Tac channel?? I think so but they never want to do it.

I know, I know, I'm getting off the original topic so if this should be a new "blog" topic, so be it...BUT..

Probably the #1 reason officers would find trouble in switching to a new zone is for our safety and other officers safety. In the event of a police call that requires fire and ems (assault, stabbing, shooting, etc.) where you folks stage and wait for the scene to be secured, communications will sometimes tell us what channel you all are on so that we can let you know when to come in versus us telling our dispatch who then has to relay it to you all. This is a HUGE problem because we are single man cars. While having to drive lights and sirens to a call in a MUCH LESS visible vehicle than a fire truck or ambulance we do not have someone to be our "guide" and also work the radio. I am NOT going to look down to change zones while going to a call. Also, we are going in to a hostile and possibly deadly scene. I need to have the ability to call for help if I need it so that means I am staying on my main channel so if I get shot at, I can call for everyone and their brother to help me!

Is this an ECC issue that maybe they can patch some channels together? I don't know but then it goes back to radio traffic itself. Ours is completely different than fire and ems.

What are your thoughts?

RPD - 03/10/10 - 14:28

RPD. There is already to much traffic on the radio. But maybe one officer report to command and relay whats needed on your channels would work better.

gen3fire - 03/10/10 - 15:02

Patching is always a possibility but its definately not preferred. It is a less reliable and sometimes interferes with communications between units. Its always better to switch directly to the channel. I understand about you driving 10-39 and cannot switch the radio between zones but the more you do it the easier it will be to find. This helps you monitor while enroute and RPD and FIRE can talk directly and takes us out of the middle. It has worked well with the few officers I have heard talk directly to FIRE when they switched over. That being said I do not think RPD should do their unit to unit talking on the same channel. We can assign you a Police OPS channel like always and you can talk on that but I think at least one officer should try to monitor if at all possible while enroute and on scene.

dispatch - 03/10/10 - 15:23

Thanks Dispatch. Hopefully in my first post I didn't come across as "I wish we could talk to you but communications is not wanting to help us out" because for me personally, you folks do a great job in the dungeon. As for myself, I have no problem switching zones because I am familiar with it but was merely talking on behalf of the majority of other officers. Now here is a question for you Dispatch, can a dispatcher who is monitoring the tac channels (on the fire side) still perform police status updates (i.e. generate report numbers, dispatch ccbi, get a tow truck, location changes, etc)? I'm trying to recall from being down there a few times if the fire/ems circle dispatchers can see the police units on their screens and do all the appropriate functions.

RPD - 03/10/10 - 15:48

Here in OKC EMS does not go to structure fires unless the on scene engine requests them or we get information from callers that persons are injured.

Raymond - 03/10/10 - 16:13

When I worked over in the Bull City, when we responded to let's say, a shooting, everyone operated on the same Ops channel (No Tac and

Ops, everything was called Ops channels) and quite frankly it worked well. We heard with our own ears that "the scene is secure" and status of the patient directly from an officer versus being relayed to one communicator, then another having to tell us the info. It really worked well.

If we needed an officer to block a certain intersection at a fire, we could tell them directly. Same with the ol' abandoned police car situation, they were on our channel and we could just holla' at them.

Wasn't that the big push of VIPER/800 mhz. anyways, to enhance the way multiple agencies communicated at a single incident?

Silver - 03/10/10 - 17:43

Raymond, here in Raleigh, EMS is on the initial dispatch with structural fires. We love our EMS folks, they take good care of us at fire scenes with rehab.

Silver - 03/10/10 - 17:45

wow...now I'm no expert but that is a safety issue waiting to happen...EMS doesn't respond to structure fires? I would like to hear that explanation. Just my opinion, but I would rather send too much and cancel than need someone and have to wait.

rookie - 03/10/10 - 17:46

Rook', a few years ago we didn't get an EMS unit unless requested. Now, they're sent early and most of the time are standing fast, waiting to help us out. It's nice to see them with a stretcher and defib at the ready FOR US...early defibrillation saves lives and since cardiac arrest is our number one killer it's a blessing to see them.

Man, we've come a looonngggg way!

Silver - 03/10/10 - 20:05

We have a GREAT response system here in Raleigh/Wake; from ECC, to fire, to EMS, to LE; but we as responders can do a little better occasionally. Our "multi-discipline" or "integrated" automatic dispatch approach is absolutely wonderful when compared too the rest of the USA. However, overcoming communications platform variations is really simple... responders should be disciplined when participating in a multi-agency response and use "Unified Command" as it is intended. and...POOF!!!,...just like magic, the barriers related to comms are much more manageable! Also, VIPER's original intent was to allow "statewide" comms and was not focused entirely on local integration initially (NCSHP). The latter has happened. Wake Co. piggy-backed and expanded upon the state's infrastructure (locally) to implement our 800mhz system. Our system was designed with the future in mind (population and organizational expansions), so we naturally have a lot of talkgroups.

A.C. Rich - 03/10/10 - 20:19

What unified incident communication— fire, police, EMS on same ops channel— are done outside Raleigh? Cary, M'ville, Wake County, etc.?

Legeros - 03/10/10 - 20:24

RPD, no problem with your post. I understood what you were trying to say. Everyone can do anything in the ECC, however, the console screens are set up differently in both circles. We hesitate to "mix" responsibilities between the two so we dont duplicate requests or confuse each other. For example, calling duplicate 10-51's or performing requests on calls that someone on the other side of the room may already be doing or may not know about.

dispatch - 03/10/10 - 21:09

Johnston County has the ability for all public safety to be on the same channel if a large enough event, or the IC decides to do so. We all use the same 800 system and have the ability to all be on the same ops channel.

Brown - 03/10/10 - 23:20

Since I work for a Wake county EMS agency I feel that it is nice to get some information on a patient. Also there is only so much that a first arriving fire dept can give you. It's nice if dispatched to a CVA, MVC or other call that can possibly be life threatening. On MVC a good patient count and if there is going to be a trauma within the MVC. This will help getting more resources on scene. and with a CVA if it's stroke thats within the time limit.

Also working with a volunteer fire dept. B/C I do have some Fire background and if My EMS rig is first on scene I will give a scene size up. I would never cancel the fire unit to the call. There should never be a reason for a EMS unit to cancel any fire equipment going to a reported structure fire. I don't think that any unit should be cleared prior to arrival unless there is no patient on an EMS scene. On MVC's the first sign of an EMS unit is always when a party involved in the wreck begin to think of how much money they can get from that scratch on the rear of the bumper.

work2much - 03/11/10 - 15:01

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What are the FIRST TWO LETTERS of the word 'fire'?

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Notify: Yes, send me email when someone replies.

Hide email: Yes, hide my email address.

Small print: All html tags except and <i> will be removed from your comment. You can make links by just typing the url or mail-address.