

FIRE CHIEFS' ASSOCIATION OF BROWARD COUNTY
Mutual Aid and Communications Committee

SUBJECT: Mutual Aid Procedural Guideline for
Broward County (FL) Fire-Rescue Agencies

DATE: November 1, 2002

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout Broward County, there are multiple independent fire rescue dispatch centers currently in operation. Some centers are responsible for dispatching only a single fire rescue agency, while others are responsible for dispatching multiple agencies. In an effort to more effectively respond to and mitigate emergencies, inter-departmentally, among all fire-rescue agencies within Broward County, a joint multi-mode mechanism and communications system has been established for requesting mutual aid assistance.

By virtue of their involvement in this county-wide Mutual Aid Request System (M.A.R.S.), each fire rescue dispatch agency should acknowledge their respective responsibility to participate actively and fully in the established mutual aid procedures, especially with regard to interacting with other communications centers for the requesting of mutual aid, continually monitoring the designated phone and radio circuits, responding to broadcasts from other centers requesting mutual aid assistance, and properly maintaining the mutual aid District Response Book.

To assist in these mutual aid request and response processes, the following county-wide procedures have been previously adopted by the Fire Chiefs' Association of Broward County, and updated herein so as to further clarify and reinforce the importance of all agencies following the specified procedures.

2. DISTRICT RESPONSE BOOK OVERVIEW

The heart of the county-wide Mutual Aid Request System (MARS) are the District Response Books. These identical, loose-leaf books are maintained at each fire rescue dispatch facility in Broward County and contain all of the mutual aid run order listings for all districts (stations) in the county. Each run sheet specifies the next due agency for several types of apparatus, command units, and special equipment... up to 20 levels deep.

In accordance with the Mutual Aid procedures adopted by the Fire Chiefs Association, each fire rescue agency must complete a mutual aid run order sheet for each district within their jurisdiction and submit such sheets to the Mutual Aid Committee for review and distribution. Blank run sheets are available from the Chairperson of the Mutual Aid Committee or the county Fire Communications administrative staff.

It is important that each fire rescue agency coordinate closely with each of the agencies that are earmarked to render mutual aid assistance to the particular district in question, so that all parties are in agreement. Agencies are reminded that mutual aid responses should not be limited strictly to adjacent agencies with closer units. As larger incidents draw deeper into the run order, the load for mutual aid assistance should be spread throughout the county, as much as possible, so as not to strip any particular area of emergency coverage.

Initial mutual aid run sheet forms (for new districts), as well as any changes to the run sheets for existing districts, must be filled out completely and approved by the Chief of the fire rescue agency and then forwarded to the Mutual Aid Committee for procedural review. Once reviewed by the Mutual Aid Committee, the run sheet form(s) will be duplicated and distributed to all local fire rescue dispatch centers.

As newly-distributed mutual aid run sheets are received at each local fire rescue dispatch center, it is essential that the OLD district sheets be removed and replaced with the NEW district sheets at the earliest opportunity. This procedure ensures that the run sheets at each of the local fire rescue dispatch centers are identical.

3. REQUEST PROCESS OVERVIEW

The Mutual Aid Request System within Broward County uses a dedicated, shared telephone circuit, 800 MHz trunked radio system, and regular telephone lines to provide redundant mechanisms for requesting mutual aid in emergencies. The primary method of requesting Mutual Aid is the MARS circuit. This is a dedicated telephone circuit designed so that whenever a dispatch center picks up the telephone handset, the speakers in all of the other Fire-Rescue communication centers become active. As the person who picked up the handset talks, the announcement is heard by all other on-line dispatch centers simultaneously.

For radio communications associated with mutual aid, including mutual aid and back-up communications between fire dispatch centers, the Broward County trunked radio system has one complete logical “zone” of fifteen (15) talk groups dedicated solely to fire-rescue mutual aid purposes. Zone 12 has been designated as the Fire-Rescue Mutual Aid Zone. Within Zone 12, talk group “A” has been designated the MUTUAL AID CALLING CHANNEL and serves as the alternate method of notification for mutual aid requests. In addition, talk groups “12B” through “12O” are available for assignment as tactical channels / talk groups to support multi-agency on-scene communications during a mutual aid incident.

Each fire dispatch center should have the capability to operate on any Zone 12 talkgroup (for tactical communications) and should monitor talkgroup A at all times when not actively monitoring tactical communications relating to a local mutual aid incident.

In the unlikely event that both the primary mutual aid phone circuit and the primary 800 MHz talk group are unavailable, a secondary 10-digit emergency telephone number (954-765-5300) is also available to request mutual aid. These three separate methods provide adequate redundancy to assure that mutual aid requests are promptly received by all centers and properly dispatched.

The primary mechanisms of notification were chosen so that mutual aid requests can be “broadcast” (i.e. - heard by all communications centers simultaneously) and mutual aid response books may be checked by all centers concurrently for those units that are earmarked (by a pre-determined call order) for response to the particular district requiring assistance.

If any communications center has units that are due to respond, the operator can begin the dispatch process immediately upon hearing the location, thereby reducing the time necessary to get mutual aid assistance to the incident. It is also important that each center has the latest version of the response sheets for each district, so that all centers are working with the same information.

This “broadcast” method of alerting multiple centers not only decreases reaction time, but also increases awareness between communications centers of mutual aid incidents that are occurring elsewhere within the County.

For these reasons, it is imperative that all participating Fire-Rescue communications centers actively monitor the MARS telephone circuit (and 800 MHz talkgroup 12A) and fully participate in the mutual aid request and dispatch process, in order to reduce overall reaction time (the amount of time from initial notification to unit response).

4. PROCEDURE

Requesting agencies may use one of the following methods to broadcast a mutual aid request to all of the Fire-Rescue dispatch centers simultaneously. These methods of notification include the MARS circuit (the primary method), two-way radio (mutual aid channel “12A”, the alternate method) or, as a last resort, a regular telephone number at the county fire dispatch center (954-765-5300). (In the case of a telephone notification, the county operator will broadcast the request over MARS (or the Mutual Aid Calling Channel) on behalf of the requesting agency.

When requesting mutual aid assistance, the following information will be required:

- The fire agency requesting mutual aid
- District number of incident location (use county-assigned district number)
- Reference of call (i.e., commercial structure fire)
- The address of the incident / name of occupancy (i.e., Broward Mall, Smith Automotive)
- Numbers and types of equipment needed
- Special instructions (i.e., staging location)
- Radio channel assigned
- Grid Number (if readily available)

If the request is made via the MARS circuit (or talk group 12A), the typical announcement shall be as follows (for example):

(General Request): **“This is Plantation Fire Department requesting mutual aid for a commercial structure fire in District 76; (repeat) This is Plantation Fire Department requesting mutual aid for a commercial structure fire in District 76.”**

(Specific Location): **“The address is 8000 W. Broward Blvd. at Burdines... Grid 876; (repeat) The address is 8000 W. Broward Blvd. at Burdines... grid 876.”**

(Resources Needed): **“Requesting three engines and one ladder; (repeat) Requesting three engines and one ladder”**

(Specific Instructions): **“All equipment report to level II staging at the Broward Mall parking lot, southwest corner; (specify designated tactical frequency or talk group; if a zone 12 tactical talk group is needed, request one from county dispatch)”**

(Acknowledgment by appropriate agencies...)

(Appropriate agencies repeat the response information, as necessary...)

(Announcing Agency confirms / corrects information as necessary...)

5. **RELATED NOTES**

If not included in the initial announcement, the appropriate communications center shall confirm the grid number and relay this information to the responding units(s) on the assigned radio channel.

Field units shall make all mutual aid requests through their regular dispatch center. Additional requests for units to the same incident should continue to be made through the Mutual Aid Request System (MARS), via the agency’s respective dispatch center.

All units responding to mutual aid shall monitor the assigned mutual aid talk group and report their enroute and arrival times to the requesting center on that talk group, in addition to any other communications with their respective “home” dispatch centers.

In order to maximize inter-agency radio coordination, it is recommended that the requesting center consider the use of a county-assigned mutual aid talk group for on-scene operations, if feasible.

Upon completion of use of a county-assigned mutual aid talk group, the channel should be cleared (by Command) by advising Broward County Communications(on talk group 12A) that the operation has been terminated.

In order to ensure continued communication between all the fire dispatch facilities throughout Broward county, the Regional center will conduct daily roll calls on the MARS system circuit and on the mutual aid radio channel (Zone 12, talkgroup A).

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