

# Fire and Rescue Departments of Northern Virginia

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Loudoun County • Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority • Prince William County • Stafford County

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## ***Senior Operations Chiefs Committee***

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### PROCEDURAL BULLETIN

**NUMBER:** 2008-002  
**DATE:** February 14, 2008  
**SUBJECT:** Emergency Activation (EA) Button  
**APPROVED:** Michael Kerr, Chair, NOVA Senior Operations Chiefs Committee  
(Signature on File)

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**EFFECTIVE DATE:** March 1, 2008

All 800 MHz radios are equipped with an Emergency Activation (EA) button. When depressed, the EA button will broadcast an emergency signal to all dispatch consoles that have been programmed for the same talkgroup (regardless if the talkgroup is monitored or not).

#### **Activating the EA Button**

**Initiating an EA signifies a critical or hostile situation in which your imminent safety is threatened and immediate assistance is needed. Therefore, all EAs will be treated seriously and should not be used unless personnel are in immediate danger.**

The user must understand the EA will transmit the emergency signal to the talkgroup currently assigned to that radio.

*For example: Engine 105 is on the scene of a working structure fire and their radio assignment is 2 Bravo. When Engine 105's EA is activated the emergency signal will transmit to Alexandria's Emergency Communications Center (ECC), not Arlington's.*

An exception to the above occurs when the user changes talkgroups during an EA. The emergency signal will move to, and continue on, the newly selected talkgroup without having to depress the EA button again. It is essential every user maintain familiarity with the location and operation of the EA button on every radio they use.

Some jurisdictions' radios are equipped with a "HOT" microphone feature, which will keep the radio in transmit mode for approximately 10 to 20 seconds after the EA has been initiated. This will allow the controlling dispatcher to obtain a better understanding of the hostile situation. Units with radios not having this feature can simulate this feature by manually keying the transmit button on the radio body or the microphone if able to safely do so. This practice should only be performed

if the information passed to the ECC will potentially help in establishing the degree of danger the units face.

### **Accidental Activation of the EA Button**

If a unit accidentally activates the EA button, the unit shall “deny” the Signal 1 acknowledgement by the dispatcher. The unit should then push and hold the EA button until the EA signal clears. This ordinarily requires one to three seconds of depressing the EA button.

### **When Not to Use the EA Button**

There are a couple of instances that the EA button will not function properly. While operating on the talk around channels (channels N and O), the EA button will not function. These channels are used for local fire ground communications and will not transmit the EA to the ECC.

Arlington is an exception to this rule. Arlington uses a FuturCom Vehicle Repeater System (VRS) that when activated turns the talk around safety channels into repeated channels. When the VRS is activated by the Battalion Chief, the VRS and ECC are capable of receiving an EA. However, they will only receive a generic EA and not the identifier or alias of the radio.

Additionally, the EA button does not function while the radio system is in the Failsoft mode. Unlike using the EA on the safety channels, when the EA button is pushed while the system is in Failsoft, the radio is inoperable for 15-30 seconds. This is caused by the radio searching for a frequency to use.

### **Signal 1 Response**

Anytime a Signal 1 is declared or suspected, the resources listed below shall be dispatched. Fire and EMS units shall stage at a safe location until scene security is confirmed by Law Enforcement Officers. This location shall be remote in order to promote personnel safety and as to not interfere with Law Enforcement response, but close enough to provide rapid deployment of resources to the scene. It is recommended that Fire and Rescue apparatus stage at a location that is not in direct line of sight with the actual incident location until further direction is received from Law Enforcement. Responding units should also be mindful of their direction of travel if directed to a predetermined staging location so as not to inadvertently pass through the incident scene.

- Fire and EMS – the closest suppression piece, EMS transport unit and Battalion Chief.
- Law Enforcement - one officer to investigate. If dispatcher has reason to believe the scene warrants a greater response they may request additional law enforcement units to respond.

### **Radio Alias and Identification**

While the radio is in its home radio zone, the assigned radio “alias” (e.g., the unit identifier) will display on the controlling dispatcher’s console.

In some jurisdictions when an EA occurs and the radio is not in its home zone the radio alias may not appear on the radio console at the ECC. The dispatcher may only receive a numerical identifier. In these instances, the controlling dispatcher shall make every attempt possible to identify the alias for the radio that the EA is broadcast from. This can be done by radio contact or by contacting the radio's home jurisdiction.

- For example, E410 has an EA in Fairfax County, E410 will be displayed. When E410 has an EA in Arlington, 741234 will be displayed. Realizing that a 74 number is a Fairfax identifier, the dispatcher could then contact the Fairfax units that are on incidents in Arlington or contact the Fairfax ECC to determine which unit the identifier belongs to.

Radio systems personnel and managers are currently working on developing a plan to share aliases across jurisdictions. Until then, it is imperative that the unit with an EA announces its unit identifier while in mutual aid jurisdictions.

### **When an EA is Received**

Once an EA is received by the ECC, the transmission will fall into one of three categories:

1. Incident without command established
2. Incidents with command established
3. Non-incident related

### **Fire and EMS Response Without Command Established**

*When a unit is on an incident without command established, e.g., a medical or automatic fire alarm call, and an EA is received by the ECC, the ECC shall make **two** attempts to contact the unit. The following is an example of the transmission that would take place:*

*"Arlington to Engine 101, confirm or deny Signal 1."*

Two attempts shall be made to contact a unit once an EA has occurred. If the unit fails to respond and is on a single piece call, the ECC will immediately dispatch additional resources per the Signal 1 response guidelines established in this policy.

If the EA is accidental, the unit will respond with the following:

*"Engine 101 to Arlington, deny Signal 1".*

If the unit fails to respond and there are additional Fire/EMS units on scene, the ECC will attempt to contact those units to identify a reason for the EA. If there is no response from any of the on scene units, or a reason for the EA cannot be determined, additional resources shall be dispatched per the Signal 1 response guidelines.

### **Fire and EMS Responses with Command Established**

If any unit activates an EA and is involved in an incident with command established, the Incident Commander (IC) will be notified of the alias of the unit or numerical radio identifier broadcasting the signal in order to take the appropriate actions. The ECC will provide the following information to the IC over the Command Channel (or Tactical Channel when a Command Channel has not been established):

*“Arlington to Wilson Blvd. Command, we are receiving an EA signal from Engine 110 on channel 1-Charlie.”*

When making an EA notification to Command, the dispatcher should use caution and remain alert for any unit attempting to make a “MAYDAY” announcement. If heard, the dispatcher shall immediately end their transmission so the “MAYDAY” can be heard. After the “MAYDAY” transmission has ended, the dispatcher shall then listen for confirmation of the “MAYDAY” by the IC. If the IC confirms receipt of the “MAYDAY” transmission, the dispatcher shall relay the EA information received. If the IC does not confirm receipt of the “MAYDAY”, the dispatcher shall relay the EA information and any “MAYDAY” information received.

The information provided by the dispatcher will help the IC quickly locate the unit’s talkgroup and allow him/her to talk directly to the affected personnel. Channel information is particularly important when command is using several different radio channels to run an incident.

The IC will then determine the nature of the situation and request the appropriate resources, as needed.

### **Non-Incident Related EAs**

At times, personnel may find themselves in situations that become hostile while not assigned to an incident. Typically, units will be on their home radio zones during these times. However, it is important to recognize that personnel monitor various radio zones and may have an EA on a radio zone other than their home zone.

When a unit is not assigned to an incident and that unit has an EA, the dispatcher shall make two rapid attempts to raise the unit. If the unit does not respond after the two attempts, the dispatcher shall contact the unit’s home station or another unit from the same home station and attempt to determine the unit’s location.

When a location of the unit making the EA cannot be determined, the EA shall be considered a Signal 1 until contact is made with that unit. Resources shall be dispatched to the unit’s last known location. In addition, a lookout shall be issued to all local Fire and EMS and Law Enforcement units.

Resources that are dispatched to the last known location shall begin to canvass the area searching for the unit. Once located, Fire and EMS units shall not engage with the unit that has made the EA.

Instead, units shall contact their dispatcher and request a Signal 1 response. That unit shall then establish a staging location for incoming resources. If possible, the unit that has requested the Signal 1 response shall maintain a safe distance from the unit with the EA, but within visual distance of the unit making the EA. This will allow the finding unit to relay any pertinent information to the ECC, which in turn can be relayed to the incoming Law Enforcement units.

**Personnel in Hostile Situations and are Not Able to Activate the EA Button**

Fire and EMS responders who find themselves on scene of a situation requiring an immediate Law Enforcement presence should utilize the Signal 1 code in their radio transmission to indicate they are in a dangerous/hostile situation. The Signal 1 code is common language terminology used to request a police response without tipping-off an aggressor who poses a threat to responders.

An example of this radio traffic would be the following:

*“Engine 107 to Arlington, Signal 1”*

The ECC will acknowledge receipt of the Signal 1 transmission by stating the following:

*“Arlington confirms Signal 1”*

Upon confirmation of a Signal 1 the ECC will dispatch the additional resources according to the Signal 1 response guidelines established earlier in this document.

Questions regarding this policy should be directed to the jurisdiction’s representative to the NOVA Communications Subcommittee.

***NOTE TO FAIRFAX COUNTY PERSONNEL: A general order will be issued in the near future that addresses the use of the Emergency Activation Button.***