



SAN ANTONIO POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL MANUAL



Procedure 403 – Communications

Office with Primary Responsibility:	SSO	Effective Date: Prior Revision Date:	June 01, 2012 August 26, 2011
Office(s) with Secondary Responsibilities:	PSC, PNC, TSC, FTC, IDC	Number of Pages:	12
Forms Referenced in Procedure:	SAPD Form #116	Related Procedures:	303, 307

.01 INTRODUCTION

This procedure identifies the necessary components and responsibilities of the communications process which are essential for maintaining the high quality of service provided by the Department.

.02 DISCUSSION

- A. The various elements of communications constitute essential links in the coordination and delivery of police services. Citizens' expectations of the Department include prompt response to the wide variety of calls received. A clear and effective communications process must be followed to ensure efficient field operations and continued confidence of the community.
- B. The Communications Unit's role is the focal point of this process. Consequently, the Communications Unit, as authorized by the Chief of Police, has the authority to direct field units.

.03 CLASSIFICATION OF CALLS

- A. A Code-One Call is a request for police services which does not present an actual and immediate potential for serious injury, damage or loss of property. A code-one call generally requires only a routine police response.
- B. A Code-Two Emergency Call means a request for police service where the immediate rapid response or arrival of police units will reduce the probability of serious injury, damage or loss of property. Common code-two responses include assaults in progress and burglars in action. Some other examples include, but are not limited to, the following:
 1. A police officer or security guard needs assistance with the arrest of offensive persons, crowd control, or imminently violent disturbances;
 2. Felonies in progress where the actor has fled and may be in such proximity that a rapid police response may result in arrest or identification of the actor;
 3. Gang fights or fights where dangerous weapons are being used;
 4. Fires where the Fire Department has not yet arrived; and
 5. Situations in which an officer may render aid prior to the arrival of medical assistance.
- C. A Code-Three Emergency Call is a request for police service which presents an actual and verified threat of immediate danger of death or serious bodily injury to a peace officer or any person. The threat must be an immediate threat and the assistance needed must be immediate. A code-three emergency call is usually prompted by any of the following requests for assistance:
 1. A police officer needs help and all instances in which the safety of an officer is directly threatened or immediate assistance is required. For example:
 - a. A police officer is in trouble, being assaulted, or involved in a shooting; or



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- b. A police officer encounters a robbery, burglary, or any other crime in progress in which the officer's intervention might be met with violent resistance.
2. Any person under imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury that the officer responding to may be able to prevent, including:
 - a. Crimes in progress, when the actor is still present, such as shootings, cuttings, robberies, sexual assaults; and
 - b. Serious situations where human life is in peril and the police have a primary responsibility.
3. Major disasters (i.e., floods, aircraft crashes, and other natural or manmade disasters).

.04 CALL ASSIGNMENT

- A. The Department has a responsibility to respond with a degree of promptness appropriate to the situation. While the priority spectrum and degree of urgency is wide, each call is extremely important to the individual placing it. For this reason, dispatchers are not restricted to district or section boundaries, or even rank (under exceptional circumstances) when assigning calls.
- B. A call, including a cover call, is assigned to uniformed personnel under a dual concept, which is:
 1. Calls are held in accordance with GM Procedure 402, *Differential Police Response*; and
 2. Assigning the officer who is available for service (normally the officer nearest the location) provides the most prompt response.
- C. The call is dispatched to an officer/UEDI in the following order, if practical:
 1. Officer/UEDI assigned to the district (or section, in the case of a Crime Scene Unit Investigator) where the call is located;
 2. Officer/UEDI completing a call in the district (or section, in the case of a Crime Scene Unit Investigator) where the call is located;
 3. Officer/UEDI assigned to an adjacent or nearest district (or section, in the case of a Crime Scene Unit Investigator) to the location where the call is located; and
 4. Officer of any rank, available for service, who may be in close proximity to the call.
- D. A cover officer(s) is dispatched to any situation that presents a potential for physical threat to the officer responding.
 1. Assignment of a cover call is at the discretion of the dispatcher, although an officer with primary report responsibility may elect to request cover based on direct knowledge of the situation.
 2. Once a cover officer has been dispatched to a call involving weapons, multiple actors, or a crime in progress, the cover officer will not be canceled until the first officer arrives at the scene and assesses the situation.
 3. An officer, not on assignment, who is in close proximity to a call which requires a cover officer, may elect to respond, although he will remain available for service unless authorized and marked out by the dispatcher.
- E. An officer arriving at the scene of a call prior to the officer with assigned report responsibility shall request the dispatcher's permission to handle the call.



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- F. An officer encountering an on-site call prior to its dispatch is expected to handle it, except at the dispatcher's discretion when the officer is on another assignment.
- G. An officer/UEDI or Crime Scene Investigator is subject to cancellation from a call or assignment by the dispatcher and placed back in service under the following conditions:
 - 1. When information is received eliminating the need for further response;
 - 2. A supervisor determines the officer is not needed; or
 - 3. A complainant refuses police services (i.e., fingerprinting stolen vehicles or burglary scenes).
- H. A call involving potential or reported threats of violence is not canceled under any circumstance.
- I. Investigative personnel are sent when required by established procedure or requested by field personnel. Dispatchers will not wait for confirmation from the responding officer/UEDI before dispatching a Crime Scene Unit Investigator to a reported shooting or cutting.
- J. A supervisor is sent when required by established procedure or requested by field personnel.
- K. The Communications Unit supervisor is notified when a call to a major incident is dispatched, or any other call requiring a number of officers to respond. For example:
 - 1. Officers in trouble;
 - 2. Pursuits;
 - 3. Large disturbances; and
- L. The Communications Unit supervisor shall monitor major incidents (examples listed above), coordinate the allocation of uniform resources with the uniform supervisor, and maintain effective uniform strength. The Communications Unit supervisor will prepare and forward an all-route electronic advisory as necessary.

.05 RADIO TRANSMISSIONS

- A. Radio traffic congestion not only reduces the efficiency of uniform units but compromises officer safety. It is the responsibility of each participant in the communications process to minimize radio traffic congestion to the greatest extent possible.
- B. Federal Communications Commission regulations prohibit any form of superfluous, indecent, or unauthorized radio communications.
- C. All voice and data transmissions conducted on any police frequency shall be directly related to police business. Personal messages of an emergency nature may be relayed with the authorization of a supervisor.
- D. All voice and computer transactions over police channels are recorded or logged primarily for the purpose of legal documentation and are available for review by supervisory personnel.
- E. Officers below the rank of sergeant are not authorized to initiate direct communication between uniform units on a primary frequency, unless the following criteria are met.
 - 1. The transaction must be incidental to an emergency in progress; or
 - 2. The dispatcher's permission must be secured prior to transmitting.



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- F. Officers may use open channels or computers as a police communications link between uniform elements.
- G. Emergency communications supersede all other forms of radio communications.
- H. Dispatchers suspend radio transmissions on all channels before broadcasting any emergency information.
- I. Code-One Call Transmission Sequence
 1. The dispatcher calls the entire call number of both the officer and cover officer, if applicable, dispatches the call, and waits a reasonable time for response.
 2. The officer answers promptly with full call number and acknowledges the call.
 - a. The officer checks his computer for dispatch information.
 3. The dispatcher gives the officer concise details about the call, repeating any numbers in the address twice. (Cross street information is given only for code-two or code-three emergency calls);
 - a. The dispatcher asks the officer if he understood the call which should be registering on the computer and if he requires any further information.
 4. The officer acknowledges receipt of the call by responding with his entire call number and will state in clear language "I copy - enroute";
 5. Officers will identify using full call sign and state in clear language "on-scene" upon arrival at the scene and will identify using full call sign and state in clear language "in-service" upon completing the call.
- J. Code-Two Emergency Call Transmission Sequence
 1. A code-two emergency call, normally preceded by an emergency alert tone, is broadcast over the affected primary channel(s) at the dispatcher's discretion. Information concerning the code-two emergency call is broadcast over each working channel at the individual dispatcher's discretion;
 2. The dispatcher calls the entire call number of the officer to be assigned report responsibility and the cover officer (if applicable), and gives concise details about the call, repeating any numbers in the address twice and giving any cross street information. The dispatcher shall verbally specify the call is to be run "code-two."
 3. The officer acknowledges receipt of the call by responding with his entire call number and state in clear language "I copy – enroute – code-2";
 4. A supervisory officer is notified;
 5. Officers will identify using full call sign and state in clear language "on-scene" upon arrival at scene; and
 6. All routine or non-emergency radio transmissions are suspended from the time of the first unit's arrival until initial radio transmission is received from the scene;
- K. Code-Three Emergency Call Transmission Sequence
 1. A code-three emergency call, preceded by an emergency alert tone, is immediately broadcast simultaneously over all primary police frequencies upon reception by the dispatcher.
 2. The dispatcher calls the entire call number of the officer to be assigned report responsibility and the cover officer, if applicable, and gives concise details about the call, repeating any numbers in the address twice and giving any cross street information. The dispatcher shall verbally specify the call is to be run "code-three."



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3. The officer acknowledges receipt of the call by responding with his entire call number and in clear language " I copy – enroute – code-3";
 4. A supervisory officer is notified to make the scene;
 5. All radio communications not directly related to the emergency call are suspended until information is received from the first unit arriving at the scene; and
 6. Officers will identify using full call sign and state in clear language "on-scene" upon arrival at scene; and
 7. The first officer arriving on the scene will advise the dispatcher and give preliminary details regarding the call;
 8. All non-emergency radio communications are suspended until the situation at the scene is stabilized.
- L. Dispatchers will only use clear language when upgrading / downgrading the response level of any call via an on-air announcement of "now code-one" or "now code-two" or "now code-three."

.06 FAILURE TO RESPOND

- A. The failure of an officer to verbally respond after two (2) successive calls from the dispatcher initiates the following process:
1. The dispatcher time-stamps and completes SAPD Form #116, *Failure to Respond Form*, and notifies the Communications Unit supervisor;
 2. The appropriate field supervisor is notified and assigned to attempt to locate the officer who failed to respond to the call from the dispatcher. The field supervisor submits a written report under the original case number with a copy routed to the Unit Commander;
 3. Another officer is dispatched to the call and given report responsibility;
 4. An officer responding after another officer is assigned the call is sent to the location to cover and contact the supervisor assigned;
 5. The Communications Unit supervisor signs SAPD Form #116 and forwards it to the Communications Unit Director; and
 6. The Communications Unit Director reviews and signs SAPD Form #116 and forwards copies to the officer's division/section commander and unit/shift commander for further disposition.
- B. If the field supervisor fails to respond after three (3) calls, the nearest available unit/shift commander is notified by the Communications Unit supervisor. The nearest available officer is then assigned the call.

.07 CHANNEL BROADCAST PROCEDURE

- A. The following information is relayed to all dispatch consoles by a communications clerk for broadcast to all officers:
1. Police officer needing help;
 2. Crimes in progress that may pose an immediate danger of death or serious bodily injury to officers responding or to any person;
 3. Severe weather conditions; and
 4. Any information essential to officers.



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- B. The following information is relayed to selected dispatch consoles by a communications clerk for broadcast to officers:
1. Emergency pursuit information of fleeing vehicles is broadcast on affected channels as the vehicle crosses channel divisions;
 2. Updating information or descriptions pertaining to felony offenses in progress or recently committed on selected channel(s);
 3. Newly received information concerning missing/wanted persons, stolen autos, and attempts to locate persons or vehicles; and
 4. Any other information essential to selected officers.

.08 INFORMATION CHANNEL PROCEDURES

- A. The Communications Unit operates an Information Channel on a twenty-four (24) hour basis to service the needs of all units.
- B. The Information Channel provides the following services:
1. Local, TCIC, and NCIC checks of the following provided the subject or item is in their custody, possession, presence, or immediate access. (A log is maintained for the purpose of validating and confirming "hits" within the system.)
 - a. Persons (missing and wanted);
 - b. Vehicles (land, water, and air); and
 - c. Property (real or tangible).
 2. Validation of warrant checks (municipal, county, state, federal);
 3. Complainant callbacks prior to n-coding calls;
 4. Case number and assignment generation;
 5. Individual or company notifications (alarms, stranded motorists, etc.);
 6. Other department notifications (public works, law enforcement entities, dog pound, etc.);
 7. Directions to new locations or addresses not found in the street guide;
 8. Updates of severe weather reports;
 9. Canceling of stolen vehicles; and
 10. Other services appropriately intended to expedite the officer's handling of police matters.

.09 RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Communications Unit
1. Screens information relayed from Communication Unit call-taker to ensure field units receive concise, but sufficient information in order to make an appropriate response;



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2. Exhibits demeanor which conveys an objective attitude of responsiveness and alertness at all times with immediate and decisive replies to each verbal transaction;
3. Ensures prompt disposition of all requests for service by properly utilizing the nearest available resource(s);
4. Provides information and assistance to field officers;
5. Adheres to proper radio procedures and decorum;
6. Maintains the availability of adequate personnel resources;
7. Avoids making any decisions pertaining to operational matters which are better resolved by field supervisors; and
8. The Communications Unit supervisor maintains a liaison with field supervisors in order to resolve problems and ensure discipline is maintained.

B. Uniform Personnel

1. Checks in service promptly after roll call and notifies the dispatcher of vehicle and radio number.
2. Continuously monitors assigned frequencies and promptly responds when called by the dispatcher throughout the tour of duty.
3. Acknowledges and accepts all calls without repetition or discussion;
 - a. No officer will fail to respond unless relieved by command authority.
 - b. Advises the dispatcher of any extenuating circumstances where response time may be reduced.
4. Requests directions to locations only if necessary on code-two or code-three calls.
5. Immediately advises the dispatcher upon encountering any circumstance which delays his response to, or cancellation from, calls and cover calls (i.e., traffic violators, suspect stops, etc.).
6. Returns to service immediately upon completion of call (this does not include the period needed to write report):
7. Advises the dispatcher of all status changes (i.e., enroute or call complete), when changing channels, or otherwise being unable to monitor the primary assigned frequency. Officers will not be excused from monitoring the radio or availability for service during:
 - a. The course of handling assigned calls;
 - b. Requested food or drink breaks;
 - c. Traffic or suspect stops; and
 - d. Personal relief breaks.
8. Plans all transmissions to minimize channel congestion and avoids interrupting any communications unless under emergency circumstances; and
9. Excludes personal references, differences of opinions, or complaints over any police frequency. Complaints about dispatchers are handled through the chain of command.



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C. Uniform Commander / Supervisor

1. Monitors radio and computer traffic involving their respective channel to preserve proper radio decorum and ensure a high degree of efficiency regarding the functions and activities of their unit;
2. Responds to and supervises the scene of all dispatched major incidents;
3. Handles complaints on officers (on and off-duty) received from the dispatcher;
4. Investigates when subordinates fail to respond to the dispatcher;
5. Responds to scenes upon request of subordinates, when feasible; and
6. Assists dispatchers in maintaining officers' availability for service.

.10 PHONETIC ALPHABET

The Standard Phonetic Alphabet, listed below, is utilized in spelling or using letters in messages:

A – Alpha	F – Foxtrot	K – Kilo	P – Papa	U – Uniform	Z - Zulu
B – Bravo	G - Golf	L - Lima	Q – Quebec	V - Víctor	
C – Charlie	H – Hotel	M – Mike	R – Romeo	W - Whiskey	
D – Delta	I - India	N – November	S – Sierra	X - X-Ray	
E – Echo	J – Juliet	O - Oscar	T – Tango	Y - Yankee	

.11 RADIO TEN-SERIES CODES

- A. In compliance with National Incident Management System (NIMS) and to be better able to communicate with other first responders, the use of Radio Ten Codes is limited to only twelve codes:
1. 10-4 Acknowledged;
 2. 10 - 11 *Cover Officer Requested*;
 3. 10 - 12 *Wanted Person / Active Stolen*;
 4. 10 - 13 *Sex Offenses/Medical Concerns*;
 5. 10 - 14 *Mentally Ill Person*;
 6. 10 - 15 *Officer or Firefighter in Trouble*; and
 7. 10 – 16 *Patient Expired*;
 8. 10-21 15 Minute Break;
 9. 10-22 30 Minute Break;
 10. 10-40A Subject Wanted on Felony Warrant;
 11. 10-40B Subject Wanted on Class A or B Misdemeanor Warrant; and
 12. 10-40C Subject Wanted on Class C Misdemeanor Warrant.



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.12 RADIO CHANNEL ASSIGNMENTS

A. The following are permanent operational radio channel assignments. Asterisks (*) indicate dispatch channels:

<u>Section, Unit, Detail, or Function</u>	<u>Channel #</u>
1. North Patrol Section	1 – A *
2. West Patrol Section	1 – C *
3. South Patrol Section	1 – E *
4. Central Patrol Section, Downtown Bike Patrol Unit, Special Victims Unit, and Park Police	1 – G *
5. East Patrol Section	1 – I *
6. Northwest Patrol Section	1 – K *
7. Information Channel	1 – M
8. Tactical Response Unit	1 – N *
9. Traffic Channel	2 – A *
10. Downtown Bike Patrol Unit	2 – C
11. Fleet Services	2 – N
12. Intelligence Unit	3 – A
<u>Section, Unit, Detail, or Function</u>	<u>Channel #</u>
13. Covert Operations Units	
a. Vice	3 – B
b. Narcotics	3 – C
14. Crime Scene Unit	3 - D
15. Repeat Offenders Program	3 - E *
16. Special Operations Unit	3 - G
17. Homicide Unit	3 - H
18. Vehicle Crimes Unit	3 - I
19. Executive Protection	3 - J
20. Night Detectives Unit	3 - K



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- 21. Asset Seizure Detail 3 - M
- 22. Shooting Team 3 - N
- 23. Internal Affairs 3 - O

B. Requests for temporary assignment of service channels for special functions or operations are made in writing to the Communications Unit Director. The requests include the reason(s) for requiring the channel, the date(s) and time(s) needed, and necessity of dispatch personnel.

.13 OFF-DUTY COMMUNICATIONS BY OFFICERS

- A. Each officer is responsible for all transmissions from his assigned radio.
- B. Radio usage is limited to police business.
- C. An off-duty officer working an extra job should check in/out with the dispatcher and monitor the channel serving the area of his location in the event of an emergency.
- D. An off-duty officer transmitting on a police radio shall identify himself by using the identifier "Bravo" before his assigned badge number name (i.e., Bravo 123 Officer Smith, Bravo 2023 Detective-Investigator Smith, Bravo 3013 Sergeant Smith, etc.).
- E. Transmissions over police frequencies by off-duty officers are limited to the following instances:
 - 1. Emergency situations where the officer needs assistance to prevent injury or loss of property are reported to the operational channel covering the area of the situation;
 - 2. Crimes in progress or major accidents are reported to the operational channel covering the area of the situation;
 - 3. Police service requests of a non-emergency nature are reported to the information channel only if a telephone is not available;
 - 4. Officers requesting prisoner transportation or case numbers may use the information channel frequency if a telephone is not available or its use would compromise the arrest or officer safety; and
 - 5. Information channel use is restricted to assistance with police related matters and hazardous situations that require an immediate response from a governmental agency (i.e., water main breaks, traffic hazards, utility problems, light malfunctions, etc.).

.14 TELEPHONIC COMMUNICATION

- A. Requests For Service
 - 1. Members receiving telephone requests for service:
 - a. Obtain the nature of the request; and
 - b. Determine if the request may be dealt with by the member receiving the call or another member present within the unit, or must be handled by a member of another unit or be dispatched to a field unit.
 - 2. If the request must be dealt with by a member of another unit, the member transfers the caller and announces the call to the appropriate unit.



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3. If the request must be dispatched, the member transfers the caller and announces the call to the Communications Unit.
4. Members receiving telephonic complaints against another member comply with the process prescribed in Procedure 303, *Disciplinary Procedures*.

B. Requests For Information

1. Members receiving telephone requests for information may confer information in accordance with Procedure 307, *Public and Media Information*.
2. Any requests from outside the Department for release of information from departmental administrative or field files are referred to the Accounting and Personnel Office.

C. Long-Distance Communication

1. Members needing to make a long-distance telephone call in conjunction with their assigned duties place the call through the Communication Unit.
2. The Communication Unit maintains a complete log of all long-distance calls charged to the Department.

.15 ACCEPTING / DELIVERING EMERGENCY MESSAGES

A. Accepting and delivering emergency messages is a legitimate law enforcement function. Therefore, members of the Department shall adhere to the following criteria when accepting and delivering emergency messages.

B. Emergency messages include, but are not limited to the following types of messages:

1. Death messages (both local and out of area);
2. Serious illness or injury messages (both local and out of area);
3. Any other types of messages which, if not delivered in a timely manner, could have adverse effects on members of an immediate family.

C. Accepting Emergency Messages

1. All incoming messages of an emergency nature shall be transferred to the appropriate unit without delay.
2. If the unit is not open or the unit with follow-up responsibility for the emergency message cannot be determined, the emergency message will be transferred to the Communications Unit supervisor's office.

D. Delivering Emergency Messages

1. The Communications Unit supervisor shall determine the nature of the emergency messages and attempt to contact the unit or member with follow-up responsibility by telephone.
2. If the unit with follow-up responsibility cannot be determined, the Communications Unit will be the unit responsible for delivering emergency messages.
3. If the unit or member with follow-up responsibility can not be contacted, a patrol officer will be dispatched to deliver the emergency message.
4. The member delivering an emergency message shall attempt to deliver the message with the understanding the message may cause some mental anguish for the receiving party.



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- a. If the emergency message has a telephone number or name of a party to contact, the member should just give the receiving party the telephone number and name of the party to contact for an emergency message.
 - b. If there is no one to receive the emergency message, the member attempting to deliver the message should leave a telephone number and name of a party to contact on a note in an easily seen location.
5. When an emergency message must be delivered to a party out of the jurisdiction of the Department, the Communications Unit or the Security Desk will deliver the emergency message by teletype to the appropriate law enforcement agency.