



# Herndon Police Department

## GENERAL ORDERS

**Operations Section**

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## COMMUNICATIONS

### I. POLICY

The Communications Section serves as the primary point of contact to direct proper police response to the public for emergency and non-emergency service requests. Communications personnel are responsible for effectively receiving and recording service requests, data, and activity, communicating appropriate information, and dispatching police resources.

### II. TERMINOLOGY

- Active units – Patrol units that have been dispatched to an incident, either on their way or arrived, and appearing as active on the CAD screen.
- Assistant Communications Supervisor – A supervisor that functions as a dispatcher and manages communications personnel and authorized systems, provides training, and oversees daily operations.
- CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch) – A software program used by communications personnel to input call information, communicate, and record dispatching activities, monitor the status of responding officers, and interface with mobile systems and other external information systems.
- Call Taker – Department personnel who have completed departmental communications training in answering emergency and non-emergency calls and initiating information into CAD. Call takers must work with a certified communications technician.
- Public Safety Operations Manager (Operations Manager) – The manager of the Communications and Records Section, who oversees communications center and Records operations, personnel, and equipment.
- Communications Technician – Technicians that have completed Basic Dispatch School and additional job-related training for state certification and are certified operators of the VCIN/NCIC system.
- Teletype – Administrative information received from other law enforcement agencies through the VCIN/NCIC agency terminal.



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- VCIN/NCIC – The Virginia Crime Information Network/National Crime Information Center, a regulated state and national communication and information system for criminal justice agencies.

### III. ADMINISTRATION

The Communications Section provides 24-hour, toll-free voice, text, and TDD telephone access to emergency and non-emergency calls, records and directs police response, utilizes specialized communication equipment and information systems, and processes criminal justice information. <81.2.1>

#### A. Continuous Coverage

Communications technicians provide continuous operational coverage of the Communications Center by assigned shifts and shall remain on duty until relieved by a technician covering the next shift.

#### B. Shift Assignment

1. Communications technicians work an established shift schedule. There are two permanent shift assignments—days and nights. The pattern schedule is ongoing and is maintained in the department's scheduling application. The operations manager shall be responsible for ensuring that the schedule is current and meets staffing requirements.
2. The Support Services Division commander may reassign communications technicians to temporary shift assignments for special situations or staffing needs. Notwithstanding, nothing in this policy shall prevent the Chief of Police or the Support Services Division commander from utilizing other shift configurations in times of emergency or need.
3. The operations manager and/or assistant communications supervisor is responsible for ensuring minimum staffing requirements are met and an orderly transition occurs between shifts in the Communications Center.
4. Communications technician trainees and call takers are required to work with a certified communications technician in the Communications Center.
5. The operations manager is responsible for providing on-call coverage for critical staffing shortages and assisting with critical communications equipment issues.



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### C. Shift Rotation and Bidding

1. Communications technicians typically remain in a shift assignment for 12 months until transferred or reassigned.
2. Shift assignments are reviewed and rotated annually following the open bidding process. Technicians' requests for specific shifts will be considered, but placement in shift assignments will be determined based on seniority (years of service), performance, or emerging needs of the department. The following summarizes the open bidding process:
  - a. The Support Services commander shall announce the annual open bidding process in a memorandum.
  - b. Communications technicians shall submit a request for shift preference for the upcoming year in response to the open bidding announcement.
  - c. Shift assignments and transfers will be effective for one year following the first pay cycle in January.
3. Shifts and assignments will be reviewed, as appropriate, to balance staffing needs, update shift bidding requests, or implement other deployment changes. The Chief of Police or the Support Services commander reserves the right, however, at any time to transfer, move, or place technicians on shifts as necessary or as needs dictate.
4. Communications technicians in training may be required to rotate shifts for a specified period to accommodate orientation or training requirements.
5. Communications technicians may exchange a single shift if both shifts occur in the same week. A shift exchange form (HP 152) must be submitted and approved by the operations manager within three days of the shift for the exchange to be authorized. Copies of the approved shift exchange form, with authorizing signatures, will be provided to both affected communications technicians, and the original form will be retained. Communications technician trainees are not eligible to request shift exchanges until they are released from training.



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**D. Coordination with Patrol**

Communications technicians shall stay informed of daily patrol operations through the roll call report and must ensure that teletypes and pertinent or timely information is updated for squad briefings.

**E. FCC Requirements**

1. All Herndon Police Department radio operations shall, without exception, be conducted in compliance with Federal Communications Commission (FCC) procedures and requirements.
2. The Herndon Police Department participates in the Fairfax Regional Digital Public Safety Radio System, licensed to Fairfax County by the FCC. The original FCC license is posted at the Fairfax County Radio Engineering and Services Branch, and a copy of the license is maintained by the operations manager.

**F. Reference Resources**

Communications personnel have ready access to the following: **<81.2.5a-g>**

1. Supervisor in charge, officer status and location indicators,
2. Duty roster of all personnel,
3. Telephone number of department members,
4. Visual maps of the service area,
5. Written procedures and telephone numbers for procuring emergency and necessary external services to the department,
6. Tactical dispatching plans.

**IV. OPERATIONS**

General guidance is provided on Communications Section operations – refer to Communications SOPs or training for comprehensive procedures.

**A. Calls**

1. Communications personnel shall promptly answer all incoming calls and obtain and record appropriate information required in CAD. The amount of information necessary will depend on the nature of the call. Communications technicians and call takers are trained to gather relevant descriptive details to assess each call for service or officer-initiated activity and to recognize and anticipate officer safety conditions to dispatch a response and assign a priority.



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2. Communications personnel are not permitted to refuse calls for police service. If a caller will not provide the location and police cannot be readily dispatched; communications personnel will notify the squad supervisor of the circumstances of the call and the caller's failure to provide information.
3. Police services may be requested by telephone, in person, by letter, electronic mail or text, or self-initiated by an officer. The following information must be recorded before dispatching an officer to a call: **<81.2.3c,d,e,j>**
  - a. Location of the incident, and suite or apartment number if applicable,
  - b. Type or nature of incident,
  - c. Name, address, and telephone number of the caller,
  - d. Name of business, if applicable,
  - e. Description of the incident,
  - f. Time lapse of the incident,
  - g. Disposition or status of the incident,
  - h. Other pertinent or critical information necessary regarding the call.
4. The CAD will automatically record the following call information: **<81.2.3a,b,f,g,h,i>**
  - a. Date and time of the call,
  - b. Reference or Control #,
  - c. Identification of officers assigned as primary and backup, and status indicators
  - d. Time an officer is dispatched, arrives on scene, and clears the call,
  - e. The beat, report area, and priority of the call.
5. Every call shall be documented by initiating a new event in CAD. When a new event is created, a reference number will automatically be generated. Events that do not result in police being dispatched, will be cancelled by the corresponding code.
6. A police incident report number shall be generated in CAD at the request of the primary officer, or any officer assigned to the same incident. Requests to cancel police incident report numbers must be submitted to the Records Section to include the case number to be deleted and the reason for deletion.



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7. Communications technicians will determine, to the extent possible, the priority of the incident and the urgency of the response needed based on the following:
  - a. **In Progress** – the incident is a high priority and is considered currently in progress or having occurred within five minutes of the emergency contact; there is the possibility that the suspect may still be present.
  - b. **Just Occurred** – the incident is an elevated priority with the event having occurred within 30 minutes of the contact; it is assumed that the suspect has left the scene but may still be in the area.
  - c. **Report** – the incident occurred more than 30 minutes prior to the contact and assumes the suspect is not in the area.
8. For crimes in progress, just occurred, or any situation where the caller may be able to provide supplemental information; communications technicians shall remain on the phone with the caller to obtain and relay updates to responding officers. If a caller disconnects before units have arrived at the scene, communications technicians shall consider the immediate safety of the caller, and attempt to re-establish connection only when safe to do so. Technicians should not remain on the phone with callers or ask for updated information in any situation that so doing so would affect the safety of the caller.
9. Calls may be entered and dispatched with the nature code “Unknown” when communications technicians have obtained a location, identified a high priority incident or caller in distress, and are unable to appropriately classify the call due to an uncooperative or otherwise unresponsive caller. For unknown calls, communications technicians must remain on the phone with the caller or re-establish telephone connection to clarify the nature of the call and identify potential threats at the scene.
10. Communications technicians may receive calls to request information or services available for victims and witnesses. Communications technicians must determine the specific need, if a crime should be reported, and the emergency or non-emergency nature of the request so that an officer can be dispatched accordingly. The responding officer will determine if the request requires investigation or a referral for services to meet the needs of a victim or witness.  
<81.2.6a,b,c>



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11. Emergency notification calls regarding a death, serious injury, or illness received for affected individuals in the town will be handled as a call for service subject to the availability of officers. A squad supervisor should be consulted regarding the priority and delivery. **<81.2.10>**
12. In the event the Communications Section receives an emergency call intended for another law enforcement agency, the caller shall be instructed to remain on the line while the call is promptly relayed to the appropriate agency. If the call is determined not to be an emergency, the caller will be given contact information for the intended agency. **<81.2.11>**
13. Communications supervisors will regularly review random recordings of calls for quality assurance and ensure standard protocols are met. Complaints alleged against communications personnel will be directed to the operations manager for handling.

**B. Dispatching a Response**

1. A single unit will be dispatched to handle routine calls for service, but backup units will be dispatched to calls for service whenever additional officers are required, such as in the following incidents: **<81.2.4e>**
  - a. To ensure the safety of the primary officer,
  - b. To adequately and effectively handle multiple tasks required at a scene,
  - c. To control an escalating situation,
  - d. For occupied suspicious vehicles or traffic stops with multiple passengers,
  - e. Traffic control assistance,
  - f. To assist with the apprehension of suspects,
  - g. When the primary officer requests backup.
2. Cancellation of backup units may not be requested before arriving to the scene. Squad supervisors may assign backup units at their discretion or as the situation dictates. If a squad supervisor cancels a backup unit to a call fitting the criteria for additional responding officers, communications technicians shall record the cancellation and overriding decision in the call information notes.



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3. At least two units will be dispatched to the following types of calls: **<81.2.4g>**
  - a. Officer needs help,
  - b. Crimes in progress or just occurred where the location needs to be checked for suspects,
  - c. Assaults,
  - d. Weapons,
  - e. Domestic violence, domestic disputes,
  - f. Emotionally disturbed persons,
  - g. Alarms and open windows or doors,
  - h. Other calls that need additional officers to ensure safety or efficiency in handling a situation.
4. A supervisor will be dispatched to any situation or event where it is requested or required, such as in the following incidents: **<81.2.4f>**
  1. Use of force incident,
  2. Any complaint involving an officer,
  3. A serious accident, injury, or incident involving department personnel or a department vehicle,
  4. Major crimes such as a murder, robbery, burglary, or assault where serious injury or death occurs,
  5. Barricade/hostage situations,
  6. Emergency circumstances, whether natural or man-made, including severe weather conditions.
5. Communications' broadcasts and dispatches carry the authority of a staff order. If a question arises as to the direction given, the squad supervisor should be consulted.
6. When officers conduct activities other than calls for service, (out-of-service, meetings, community outreach, follow-ups, etc.) the communications technician will record the events in CAD as "administrative tasks".
7. Officers will be dispatched to respond to commercial and private residential alarm calls.
8. If there are no units available to dispatch to a call for service, technicians will immediately notify the squad supervisor by radio of a holding call and record the time of notification in the information notes of the call.





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9. When an officer is dispatched to a call, communications technicians must assign the unit to the call in CAD. Any officer not dispatched by Communications, but responding to a call, shall notify Communications by radio of their response to the incident.
10. Communications technicians will monitor the status of active units at established intervals based on the nature of the incident. Traffic stops and other calls that have the potential to escalate will be checked on a more frequent basis.
11. Communications technicians are prompted through CAD to check on the status of officers, and when prompted, they must inquire, record the status, and reset the timer for the next interval. An officer may request extension of the timer but may not cancel it. If the interval of time is extended, the communications technician will indicate the extension in the notes. Officers may not extend the timer beyond 30 minutes at a time.
12. Communications technicians shall not check on the status of officers when the channel is closed, and will resume only when the channel is reopened, unless directed by a supervisor. Squad supervisors may request communications technicians check on the status of active units at any time.
13. Critical incidents and special events require focused communications and tactical considerations. In such circumstances, communications technicians will give priority to emergency traffic. For critical incidents, communications technicians shall be familiar with responsibilities outlined in the All Hazard Response Plan. Special operations, such as a tactical operation or a special event, require a prepared operation plan prior to the operation or event. Communications technicians shall be familiar with the protocol and directives of a special event or an operation plan.

**C. Radio Operations**

Effective and efficient radio interaction between Communications, police units, and other agencies requires proper radio protocol. The department has multi-channel mobile and portable radios capable of two-way operation on a joint public safety frequency. The department participates with the Police Mutual Aid Radio System (PMARS) for interagency communications. **<81.2.4d>**



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1. The department adheres to clear speech guidelines which consist of concise, discernible phrases in plain English without the use of "10-codes". The only exception to this protocol will be the universally accepted "10-4" code, which equates to "message received" and "Signal" codes for certain sensitive information.
2. Officers are responsible for maintaining effective radio contact with Communications during their tour of duty to indicate their status of en route, arrival, clearing, stops, and self-initiated activity, out-of-service, as well as other administrative activities. If active units have not provided their response status, technicians will prompt officers for this information to ensure an accurate record of activity is documented. **<81.2.4a,b>**
3. Radio transmissions shall be professional, concise, and contain only the necessary information.
4. An alert tone is sounded prior to broadcasting an in-progress or just occurred priority call to indicate the nature and urgency of the call. When an alert tone has been sounded, officers and communications technicians shall give precedence to the priority call.
5. Certain information is restricted by law or is sensitive in nature for broadcasting over the radio, and the following shall apply:
  - a. Unless it is critical to officer or public safety, broadcasting of criminal history information is prohibited.
  - b. Broadcasting of wanted person hits, violent or dangerous persons, gang members, or known drug users shall be preceded by "Signal 4".
  - c. If medical information is known and relevant to a call, instruction to "use universal precautions" should be broadcast for officer safety.
  - d. Utilize the term "EDP" for officer safety when broadcasting mental health conditions.
6. Communications technicians and officers shall exercise discretion before broadcasting the names of complainants, suspects, or juveniles on the radio.



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7. Communications technicians will advise officers, as appropriate, with emergency weather related conditions or operational impacts that may affect officer safety.

D. Mobile Computer Terminal (MCT) Exchanges

The MCT supplements radio operations and communications technicians must effectively respond to officers' requests for service information, database inquiries, and status updates. Exchange of information over the MCT allows radio channels to be readily available for priority communications.

V. EQUIPMENT AND SYSTEMS

The operations manager is primarily responsible for maintaining the equipment and systems in the Communications Section and coordinating the update, repair, or replacement of the systems.

A. Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD)

The CAD system manages the functional, geographic, and documented activity of incidents and events. The operations manager will work with IT or command staff to maintain the CAD system and ensure it is updated as needed and working effectively. All officers and communications technicians will be assigned a unit number in the CAD system (CAD designator) and activity will be recognized according to these assignments. Communications will maintain a master list of all designators and new designators will be assigned as applicable. **<81.2.4c>**

B. Portable and Mobile Radio Systems <81.2.2>

1. The radio system, with multichannel mobile and portable radios, provides continuous radio transmission capability between the Communications Section and officers on duty within a joint public safety frequency or frequencies. The operations manager shall coordinate periodic evaluations of the system to ensure radio equipment is fully functional and capable of maintaining two-way transmissions with acceptable reception.
2. Patrol supervisors shall ensure that their squads have tested portable and mobile radio equipment prior to their duty shift. Defective or otherwise malfunctioning radio equipment (mobile or portable) must be reported to the operations manager, who will coordinate the repair or replacement.



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3. The radio equipment room must remain locked. The primary keyholder is the operations manager; however, an assistant communications supervisor or a Patrol supervisor may access the radio equipment room utilizing the master key to address urgent equipment needs or repairs and document the actions taken on the equipment log.
4. The operations manager is responsible for maintaining the inventory of functioning radio equipment and retiring non-functional radio equipment. The operations manager shall inventory the functional equipment and retire non-functional equipment annually. The inventory list will be maintained in the radio equipment room, to include equipment issuance and assignments.

### C. Digital Recording System

1. The operations manager is responsible for the maintenance, operation, and secure handling/storage of digital recordings. The recorder shall have immediate playback capability and will continuously record all radio transmissions and emergency and non-emergency telephone lines within the Communications Section. Recordings shall be secure and retained for a minimum of 90 days. **<81.2.7a,b>**
2. Personnel who wish to review a recording for a criminal investigation, an internal affairs investigation, the investigation of an incident, or an authorized audit, shall submit a request to the operations manager or the assistant communications supervisor. The operations manager will maintain a log of all requests for recorded conversations. Only personnel authorized by a division commander, lieutenant, or the operations manager may duplicate digital recordings. Nothing in this policy prohibits the immediate playback of recorded conversations by communications technicians for verification of information received. **<81.2.7c>**

### D. Phone Systems

The Communications Section monitors emergency 9-1-1, non-emergency, and TDD (telecommunications device for the deaf) phone systems and accepts text messages from mobile phones or devices. The emergency 9-1-1 calls are relayed through the Fairfax County Public Safety Communications Center.



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E. Regulated Information Systems

1. VCIN/NCIC/NLETS

The department maintains designated access as a criminal justice agency to VCIN and other criminal justice networks and complies with state and federal regulations that govern access. Authorized users are certified as necessary by the state and will be assigned individual operator access. Should the VCIN connection be lost for an extended period, the operations manager, assistant communications supervisor, and the Support Services Division commander shall be notified, and the incident logged. Appropriate repair services will be initiated.

2. LinX (Law Enforcement Information Exchange)

The department maintains an authorized connection to the LinX system which allows criminal justice agencies to share and access law enforcement data from other states, localities, and national databases to support investigative and tactical operations and information. The Communications Section will train and monitor individual user access.

F. Security Cameras

Communications personnel monitor activity from the building security cameras, the sally port camera, and the processing area and ensure that the systems are functioning properly. The IT technician and the operations manager will be notified of non-functioning cameras to coordinate repair.

VI. SECURITY <81.3.1, 81.3.2>

A. Communications Section Access

The Communications Section is a secure area and access is limited to authorized department personnel. Contractors and others that are granted limited access are subject to CJIS compliance and associated training. If access is allowed for members of the public or contractors without CJIS training, they must sign the visitor log and always be escorted by department personnel.

B. Facility and Equipment Security

The department will take appropriate measures to protect the operations, specialized equipment, and applicable software applications of the Communications Section, to include transmission lines, antennas, and other necessary resources. Provisions for continuity of operations include:



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1. A back-up generator that is sufficient to ensure electrical power is restored in the event of a system failure.
2. An off-site, back-up communications center in the event of an incident that renders the primary center unavailable.