

**WESTMORELAND COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY  
COMMUNICATIONS CRITICAL (COMM CRITICAL) MODE STANDING OPERATING GUIDELINES**

**General Information**

This SOG provides 800 MHz radio system users with guidance on the operation of the County 800 MHz trunked radio system during high/extremely high radio system volume periods. These high volume periods will be called **Communications Critical or COMM CRITICAL Mode**. **COMM CRITICAL Mode** Operations describe working conditions in the 9-1-1 Center when the Center is getting inundated with calls and radio call volume is very high.

The purpose of the 9-1-1 Center going into **COMM CRITICAL Mode** is to process the large number of calls in a timely and effective manner and to alleviate system overload due to the high volume of incidents/ system users.

WCDPS may implement **COMM CRITICAL Mode** for any incident resulting in extremely high call volume:

1. Weather incidents that include, but are not limited to severe thunderstorms, severe winter weather, high winds, tornados, and flooding.
2. Man-made incidents that include, but are not limited to, the following: large fires or multiple and simultaneous fires, mass casualty incidents, major hazmat events, and weapons of mass destruction events.
3. **Any county-wide incident that causes all radio channels to be busy simultaneously for an extended period.**

The Mobile Area Radio Repeater Vehicle (MARRV) will be placed on standby for **COMM CRITICAL Mode** events. If an incident significantly overloads the 800 MHz radio system or if the MARRV is requested by an Incident Commander, the MARRV will be deployed as per instructions of the DPS Administration Staff.

**9-1-1 Supervisor Responsibilities**

The Shift Supervisors will notify the 9-1-1Center TCO's of all incoming weather related incidents. These include:

1. Winter Storm watches, warnings and deteriorating road conditions due to fast moving snow storms and ice.
2. Conditions that will lead to flooding of streams, roadways, commercial and residential structures.
3. Any type of wind advisories, high wind warnings, tornado watches and warnings, etc.

Shift Supervisors will monitor **ZONE WATCH** when a major event is predicted to occur or is occurring. The Shift Supervisor or Senior Administration will elevate the 9-1-1 Center to **COMM CRITICAL Mode** during a high volume incident when all radio channels are busy simultaneously for an extended period of time or when a high volume incident is expected. The incident will serve as a focal point for logging information regarding the **COMM CRITICAL Mode**.

**COMM CRITICAL Mode Operations - Within the Communications Center.**

1. The following announcement will be made on Fire Dispatch, EMS Dispatch, City Fire and all Police frequencies when **COMM CRITICAL Mode** has been activated:

*(Alert one tone) Attention all stations in Westmoreland County, COMM CRITICAL Mode/ is now in effect. Make all non-emergency status changes by phone.*

2. The following announcement will be made on Fire Dispatch, EMS Dispatch, City Fire and all Police frequencies when **COMM CRITICAL Mode** has been lifted:

*(Alert one tone) Attention all stations in Westmoreland County, COMM CRITICAL Mode has now been lifted, resume normal operations.*

3. When the 9-1-1 Center is operating in **COMM CRITICAL Mode** and numerous calls of the same nature are received, they will be transmitted to the Fire Station (FS) by phone. If there is no answer by phone at the FS, that FS will be activated. Once activation has occurred all other storm related calls will be given to them by phone.

**During COMM CRITICAL Mode Operations, 9-1-1 recommends at least one person man your station to receive calls via phone from the 9-1-1 Center, if the incidents are affecting your area.**

4. If call overflow is high enough to require calling in additional personnel, the 91-1 Center CAD overflow work stations will be staffed to pull calls out of waiting and dispatch them by phone to the appropriate Fire Stations.

### **Radio Procedures**

All fire departments will be dispatched as per normal procedures from the 9-1-1 Center.

After acknowledgement of vehicle accidents, trees down, traffic control, **all radios on scene at that incident, with the exception of the Incident Commander, will switch to Channel 16 talk-around channel**, and continue scene operations. This will take them off the trunk system and place them on a conventional talk group. This procedure will free up channels on the system and help alleviate system "busies."

All non-emergency situations will be assigned to Channel 16 after field units are on scene of the incident and nothing else is required from the 9-1-1 Center. The Company OIC should monitor their Command Channel (Channel 2 position on all radios) for any additional calls. **The OIC should use the Command Channel for communications with the 9-1-1 Center ONLY.**

All police departments and EMS services will be dispatched as per normal procedures from the 9-1-1 Center. After acknowledgement, all services will ensure that the radio is used for emergency information only and that transmissions are brief and to the point.

All emergency service support agencies (County agencies, Transit Authority, Public Works, local government, etc) will ensure that their radios are used for emergency information only and that transmissions are brief and to the point.

### **NOTE: Channel 16 WILL NOT BE MONITORED by Westmoreland County 9-1-1.**

As the trunked system becomes overloaded with users during **COMM CRITICAL Mode** operations, it may be necessary to place all Fire Departments from the same zone on a single TAC.

*Example: all Westmoreland County Fire Departments dispatched to different incidents in the same geographic area will be placed on one TAC channel. The same procedure of switching to Channel 16 will be in effect for stacking fire units.*

The exception to this procedure will be an event that is life-threatening, i.e. house fires, vehicle fires, outbuildings next to a residence, and vehicle accidents with entrapment. These events will be assigned their own TAC talk-group if possible.

Non-life threatening calls, when possible, will be dispatched by telephone to fire stations after an initial dispatch to a storm related type incident. Westmoreland 9-1-1 recommends that the Departments use any means of communication available (channel 16 talk-around, cell phone, Nextel direct-connect, local government radio, etc.) **EXCEPT** the trunked radio system to pass these non-life threatening calls to their field units.

Westmoreland 9-1-1 **WILL NOT TRACK** equipment and personnel status changes for non-life threatening incidents after the initial information is given to a department. **Units SHOULD NOT REPORT "responding", "on scene", or "in service"** to Westmoreland Dispatch for these type of incidents.

**Radio transmissions should only be directed to Westmoreland 9-1-1 if an EMERGENCY or LIFE THREATENING SITUATION exists.**

Departments are encouraged to call by telephone with updates on the status of incidents in their communities and/or receive information on additional incidents that may be accumulating and awaiting action.

After **COMM CRITICAL MODE HAS BEEN LIFTED**, departments can call the 9-1-1 Center on the non-emergency line to get information on any particular incident assigned to their agency.