



Greater Boston Police Council

BEST PRACTICES FOR DISPATCH AND BAPERN OPERATIONS

The best practices described below are intended to help dispatchers provide effective assistance to 911 callers by ensuring that the resources they need are deployed efficiently.

Best Practices

- Begin each shift with a checklist of all radio channels and equipment. Check all channel volumes. When complete, the checklist can be initialed by the dispatcher and submitted to the sergeant.
- **ALL** 911 calls should be dispatched over the air, even when you send cruisers from the station. You have no idea how many detective, task force, federal, and state units are in the area monitoring your calls, not to mention off-duty officers on their own time, returning from court, etc. Detectives have often pointed out that they were in the area of a crime but did not know it because the cruiser responded from the station and the call was never broadcast.
- Use the radio. Keep everything operational OFF the Nextel. Nextels and cell phones should only be used to pass information that is highly confidential.
- All 911 calls should be dispatched by format. Always dispatch location first, followed by the nature of the call and then details about it.
 1. Location
 2. Nature of the Call
 3. Details

Remember that you are talking to people who are in motion, so officers need the location first. It does no good to dispatch "bank robbery, three men with guns, shots fired ..." if officers don't know where it is. Or "911 caller on the line, her baby is not breathing, we are providing CPR instructions by telephone ..." if you have no idea where the caller is calling from. An officer could be driving right into the situation, or be racing in the wrong direction. Instead:

123 Main Street, alarm, ADT reports motion ...

68 Spring Street, investigate a B&E, we're on 911 with the homeowner who came home and found her door kicked in. She's sitting out front in her car

798 Mill Street, medical, man awoke to find his wife unconscious. We're giving CPR instructions by phone.

Always Location, Nature, Details, in that order. Location, Nature, Details. And when broadcasting the nature, avoid a long story. Use the specific crime or offense if known.

- Provide street addresses for all locations, not just landmarks or historical references.
- When broadcasting vehicle descriptions, always broadcast model and color followed by plate number. Some dispatchers give out the plate, and then repeat it, before they tell you what kind of car you're looking for. If an officer knows the type of car first, he/she doesn't have to try to read the plate of every single vehicle that passes.

Caller reports the vehicle was a red Honda, Mass reg 123-ABC

Not the other way around.

This way, the officer only has to try to read the plates on red Hondas, not every plate that passes.

And please give out a vehicle description as soon as you have it. Do not run the plate first. Running the plate takes valuable time. You can tell when this happens because the dispatcher gives out the description and then says, "vehicle is registered out of ..." So you know he or she ran the plate before they gave it out. A suspect vehicle can travel a mile or more in the time it takes a dispatcher to run a plate.

- Use the alert tone for "hot calls" where you want any unit near the location to respond (robbery in progress, baby choking, B&E in progress, etc.). Broadcast the call without identifying a specific unit.

Marion Control to the cars: 340 Front Street, Eastern Bank, just robbed by two gunmen, fled on foot. More to follow.

- If you have a building intercom or building-wide paging capability on your phone system, use it to announce hot calls that may require the response of detectives and admin officers.

Bank robbery Eastern Bank 340 Front Street.

- Dispatchers should broadcast calls requiring 2 cruisers to the primary car first, and then assign a back-up.

Marion Control to Marion 94.

Marion 94 Front Street

Route 6 at 105, a two car crash with injuries, fire and medics en route.

Marion 94 Roger.

Marion Control to Marion 98

Marion 98 Mill and Ryder

Assist 94 with the crash Route 6 at 105 ...

Some departments call out to two cars, the cars then step on each other answering, then the dispatcher gives out the call, then the two cars step on each other again. When units arrive, the officers don't always know whose call it is.

- BOLOs
 - a. Broadcast an emergency BOLO as soon as you get it.

Marshfield Control to all units, Marion is looking for a blue Caravan just involved in a bank robbery. Last seen Front Street northbound. More to follow.

- b. For non-emergency BOLO's, don't just broadcast the BOLO, and then have every unit step on each other Rogering the BOLO. Announce that you are about to issue a BOLO and give officers a chance to pull over and grab a pen. (There's nothing more aggravating than having officers ask over and over "what was that plate Braintree was looking for?")

Marshfield Control to all units, stand by to copy a BOLO out of Marion

Wait 30 seconds, then broadcast the BOLO

Confirm by calling units in numerical order:

550? 550 has it

551? 551 Roger
552? 552 has it
Units have it at 1432 hours

- If a detective or plainclothes unit calls in that it is responding to a call, Roger the call by acknowledging that plainclothes officers are en route. Detectives, as well as marked units, should call off upon arrival at all calls. When detectives call off, they should announce that plainclothes officers are at the scene. Remember that a unit from another agency may be responding without your knowing it.

All units responding to the alarm at Eastern Bank be advised that plainclothes units are responding.

BAPERN Issues

- There is a delay on the District channels and on AREAWIDE 3. You need to hold the key down for a two-count before you transmit. This is likely different from your primary channel. At most police stations, the dispatcher can key the mike and speak immediately: "Marion Control to Marion 94."

But when you use AREAWIDE 3, there is a delay, so the first word or two is clipped. The same dispatcher dispatching the same call would generate "Trol" instead of "Marion Control". Very often you hear on AREAWIDE 3 "Control to surrounding cities and towns, just occurred in this town ...". You never find out where they are. For this reason, you should also repeat your department during the transmission. If you hold the key down and wait, and then repeat your department so everyone knows direction of flight and proximity, your transmission would be more effective and less frustrating to field units.

Marion Control to surrounding cities and town; just occurred in Marion ...

- Use proper BAPERN format, "Marshfield Control to Marshfield 552". This is nothing new, it has been around since the 1970's. Whether dispatchers and officers get lazy, or department supervisors don't stay on top of it, some dispatchers and officers have generated their own shortcuts, so instead of "Marshfield Control to Marshfield 552", you hear "Control to 52", or even "Control to 2" or even in the extreme, "2 car?" to which the officer answers "2". Aside from the obvious unprofessional sound of this, dispatchers don't realize how many officers from area departments are scanning their channel. So it's frustrating to hear, "2 Car?" "2" "bank robbery just occurred at 240 Front ...". Again, you have no idea where this event has occurred.

- Dispatchers and officers should resist the temptation to ask questions of departments trying to put out a BOLO, especially when the information is not important. You'll hear Boston put out a description of a bank robber, and then some Podunk PD will ask, "Do you know how much was taken?" Who cares? Just look for the guy and stop bothering the obviously busy dispatcher!

Or a dispatcher or officer will ask, "Do you have any direction of travel?" Again, who cares? If the department is east of you, and the guy ran easterly when he ran out of the bank, are you going to skip looking for him just because he parked on the east side of the bank?

Or even, "What type of weapon was shown?" The guy robbed a bank! Officers should assume he might have a gun even if he didn't offer it to the teller for examination!

Or another pet peeve, "How long ago did this happen?" You know what 's coming, "Just look for the guy!!!!" There should be NO clarification questions following a BOLO, they are seldom necessary.

- Operational issues between BAPERN agencies should be transmitted over the air, not by telephone. That's the idea behind BAPERN.
- If an event is between you and another department in your district, conduct it over the district channel. Example: a subject flees a traffic stop near the town border. Notify the other department using your district channel. Then, units from BOTH departments working that operation should switch to the district channel so that all units hear all communications.
- If an event is along the border with a department in another district, move it to one of the two district channels. It does not really matter which one you choose. Static events should not be conducted on AREAWIDE 3.
- If a pursuit is heading deeper into your district, pursuing units should move it up to the district channel.
- Use your district channel to "hand off" a 911 caller who is in motion (following suspected drunk driver, medical emergency in a moving vehicle).
- If a pursuit is heading out of your district, pursuing units should switch up to AREAWIDE 3.

- BOLOs for serious crimes should be broadcast over AREAWIDE 3, either by a dispatcher or directly by a field unit.
- When a field unit or dispatcher broadcasts a BOLO, a warning should precede it so that units will monitor the proper channel.

Wareham 25 to the cars, switching up to AREAWIDE 3 for a BOLO.

Programming and Equipment Issues

- Channel Patching

Channel patching allows the dispatcher to combine two channels into one. For instance, if a Marion dispatcher patches her channel with the Southeast District channel, everything transmitted over the Marion channel will be heard by everyone on Southeast District, and everything transmitted on Southeast District will be heard by all Marion units.

- Channel patching makes sense when most of your units are involved with an operation involving another department in your district. It allows your units to communicate over the district channel without changing the channel on their radios.
- When patching to your district channel, announce you are doing so:

Marion Control to Marion units, patching with the Southeast District

Marshfield Control to Marshfield 552 on Southeast District patch.

- Channel patching is NOT effective for vehicular pursuits because units broadcasting on their primary channel will soon move out of range. They will be unable to hit their department's repeaters, which are located exclusively in their own jurisdiction. However, district repeaters are located throughout the district, and AREAWIDE 3 repeaters are located throughout the BAPER region.

- Simulcast

Another programming feature for departments to consider is a console button programmed to simulcast. This allows the dispatcher to simultaneously broadcast over several frequencies.

- The most obvious application is BOLO's for serious crimes where a dispatcher can provide the description of the getaway vehicle simultaneously over his or her primary channel, the district channel and AREAWIDE 3.
- The difference between a patch and a simulcast is that with simulcast, field units acknowledging a BOLO will not be heard over the district channel and AREAWIDE 3.
- The Half Patch (AGB)

The "half patch", called AGB by Motorola, will transmit your mobile and portable messages to the preprogrammed channels, like the description in a holdup, but will not transmit the messages from recipients in other towns back on the primary channel. This keeps the local channel clear.

- With a half patch, a field unit at the scene of a hold up can request a half patch to broadcast a description. Once it is up, the field unit can broadcast the description to units of his own department, as well as units monitoring the district and Areawide 3 channels.

Marion 97 to Marion Control, requesting a half patch for a BOLO.

Marion Control to Marion 97, patch is up, go ahead with your BOLO

Marion 97 to surrounding departments, be on the lookout for a maroon Toyota just involved in a bank robbery, Mass reg ...

LEGAL ASPECTS OF DISPATCHING

Probable cause in Massachusetts is determined using the so-called "two prong test" of veracity plus basis of knowledge.

VERACITY PRONG:

While you may accept anonymous calls, try to get the caller's name. The court is very suspicious of anonymous tipsters. Normally, people who provide their names and addresses are deemed to be reliable. If you do not know the caller, ask for their name and telephone number.

If the caller refuses to identify himself and is calling on 911, jot down the number on your ANI screen and ensure you get it to the officer writing the report.

You may also show that the caller is reliable if your officers can corroborate what he has said. The court is more impressed with corroboration of suspicious details or events which have not yet happened rather than facts which could be reported by an "uninformed bystander".

BASIS OF KNOWLEDGE PRONG:

While you must get details about the tip being phoned in, remember to ask the 911 caller how he knows what he knows. If the caller gives you an unacceptable basis, such as "take my word for it" ask, "Did you see that happen?" or "Were you with him when that happened?", etc.