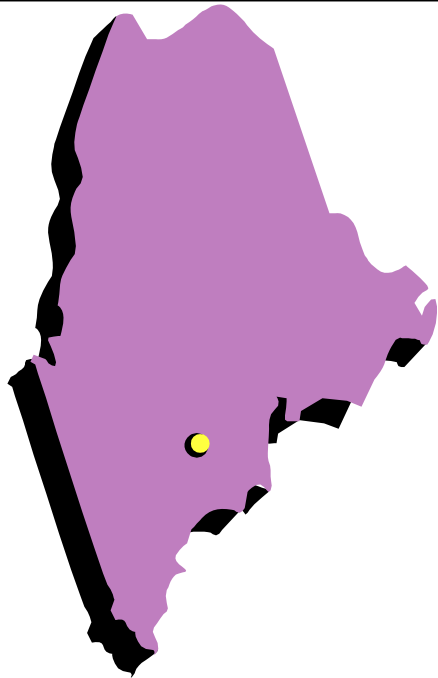# STATE OF MAINE

Concept of Operations Plan (CONOPS)

FOR

INCIDENT COMMUNICATIONS INTEROPERABILITY

Submitted by State Office of Information Technology and Maine Emergency Management Agency

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INTRODUCTION

Two-way radio voice communications are critical to the effective management of first responders and the coordination of their duties as well as their safety during emergency operations. Radio communication enables the immediate and critical command and control function in all public safety operations, but especially during emergency and disaster operations which require multi-agency (police, fire and EMS) within a community, mutual aid response and outside agency support from local, county, state and federal agencies. Communications planning is an important part of incident response planning. In order for effective communications to exist, interoperability between agencies must exist. Simply, agencies must be able to communicate by radio and with one another in and effective and efficient manner.

According to Public Safety Wireless Network (PSWN), a jointly sponsored initiative, by the Department of Justice and Treasury and now part of SAFECOM, the purpose of interoperability is so that *"no man, woman or child ever loses his or her life because public safety officials cannot talk to one another"*. PSWN states that *"interoperability is the ability for on demand and real time radio communications between public safety personnel and personnel from other agencies"*. Simply, interoperability is the ability of public safety officials to communicate with each other across different radio systems when the need arises.

Public safety agencies in Maine must establish interoperability capabilities and protocols that will allow them to meet the increased demands for interoperability within local jurisdictions, with mutual aid partners, state, federal and non-traditional responders when the need arises.

Good interoperability will enhance public safety operations day-to-day as well as during mutual aid, major events, emergencies and disasters. Partnering with all of our communities in this effort will lead to a more coordinated and effective capability to meet the public safety needs throughout the State of Maine.

SECTION 1 – GENERAL

1.1. PURPOSE. This Concept of Operations Plan (CONOPS) provides guidance to public safety agencies (traditional first responders) and non-traditional responders for developing and employing on-scene interoperability through an effective Incident Communications program.

This CONOPS will focus on incident communications requirements and the role of interoperability. A communications partnership must exist between all public safety agencies in the state. It must also include state, federal and other agencies such as the, US Coast Guard, National Guard, public works, utilities and other support agencies that would be engaged in supporting response and recovery efforts for a major event, emergency or disaster in Maine. It is essential that these partnerships are established and maintained by all of the agencies within the State in order for interoperability to exist. There must be cooperation and support among all players to ensure capabilities enhance operations.

1.2. BACKGROUND.

1.2.1. In the early 1970's Maine converted to a statewide VHF High band radio system for Law Enforcement agencies. At the same time, most Fire and Emergency Medical Services also converted. This new system provided one common state wide Fire & EMS and one law enforcement interoperability channel. The "State Fire" channel was developed for use between agencies to request mutual aid and provide interoperability at the scene. The law enforcement interoperability channel, called "State Wide Car to Car" (SWCC), was developed for use between various law enforcement agencies when working together in the field. Originally, the only dispatch centers authorized to operate on SWCC were the Regional Communications Centers (RCCs). Today, many agencies have it in their dispatch centers, ambulances, rescues and fire apparatus in addition to law enforcement agencies. Both channels are under utilized at times and used for purposes that they shouldn't be at other times. No published guidelines existed and no real controls were in place. The effectiveness of these two channels was limited.

While limited day-to-day interoperability between agencies can be met utilizing these two common channels; two channels will not support communications during a CONOPS situation. Additionally, the use of any agencies

primary channel for interoperability is a poor solution for a variety of reasons, which includes but is not limited to tying up the agency's primary dispatch channel for incident communications.

1.2.2. Only one additional channel now exists for statewide interoperability. It is the EMS disaster channel. Some agencies throughout the state may have licensed other talk-around channels for their local use.

1.3. DEFINITIONS

1.3.1. Interoperability: *"interoperability is the ability for on demand and real time radio communications between public safety personnel and personnel from other agencies or organizations"*. Simply put, interoperability is the ability of public safety officials (Law Enforcement, Fire & EMS) to communicate with each other using one or more statewide common talk-around channels. This also includes the capability to communicate with "non-traditional" public safety agencies and organizations who may be called to the scene . These agencies include but are not limited to: Public Works, Maine Department of Transportation, USCG, FBI, EPA, National Guard, REMIS (Regional Emergency Medical Information System), Poison Control, Transportation, Utilities such as the Water District, Gas Company, Central Maine Power, Telecommunications companies such as Verizon and AT & T and other agencies or organizations that would be involved included the extended response efforts when a major emergency or disaster strikes.

1.3.2. Talk-around channels: Simplex, single frequency channels permitting direct point to point communications between two or more radios without the aid of repeaters or remote transmitter/receiver systems.

1.3.3. There are 3 types of interoperability.

1.3.3.1. *Day to Day:* Involves communications and coordination for routine or local public safety operations. This could be single agency or multiple agency single jurisdiction response such as Police, Fire and EMS in the same community.

1.3.3.2. *Mutual Aid:* Involves multi-jurisdictional (out of town) and immediate response to events and incidents (major or catastrophic) and requires communications between numerous public safety agencies and personnel from throughout a region.

1.3.3.3. *Task Force:* Involves local, state, and federal agencies operating together for an extended period of time to address a public safety incident (major or catastrophic). This may also include non-traditional agencies engaged in response and recovery efforts such as the local public works and State Dept of Transportation, the utilities, transportation and others that become critical partners to the public safety agencies during a major events and incidents.

1.3.4.   During major events, emergencies and disasters, traditional public safety agencies are not equipped or staffed to handle all the requirements in such an event. Local, state and federal as well as other assets in the public sector quickly become an extension of the public safety community when engaged in the response and recovery stages of these types of events. They too need to be able to communicate with public safety officials at the scene of an incident or event.

1.3.4.1. Traditional Public Safety Agencies include Law Enforcement (Local, County and State), Fire and Emergency Medical Services and various other functions of the Maine Department of Public Safety.

1.3.4.2. Non-traditional public safety agencies are those agencies that do not have a traditional public safety role day to day. These agencies are not necessarily considered part of the public safety community except during a major event, emergency or disaster, at which time they would work under the umbrella of public safety. These agencies include but are not limited to: Public Works, State Dept. of Transportation, USCG, FBI, EPA, FEMA, National Guard, , REMIS (Regional Emergency Medical Information System), Poison Control, Transportation, Utilities such as the Water District, Gas Company, Central Maine Power, Telecommunications companies such as Verizon and AT & T and other agencies or organizations that might be involved included the extended response efforts when a major emergency or disaster strikes.

1.3.5. After-action review (AAR). The After Action Review (AAR) is an interactive discussion conducted following the conclusion of a CONOPS activation to help MEMA and the signatories to CONOPS review the event and determine ways and means to improve future CONOPS performance. The MEMA Director will host the AAR with the incident commander and other appropriate participants.

1.4. ASSUMPTIONS. The State of Maine's Office of Information Technology, in coordination with the Maine Department of Public Safety and the Maine Emergency Management Agency, has arranged for the use of six (6) statewide talk-around channels for on-scene interoperability between mobile and portable radio users. All public safety agencies in the state will agree to support this Concept of Operation (CONOPS).

1.4.1. All Police, Fire, EMS and non traditional public safety agencies VHF portable and mobile radios may be programmed with the common interoperability channels identified in this CONOPS, thereby establishing a standard throughout the state.

1.4.1.1. Federal, State and local non-traditional public safety agencies will be provided with the channel/frequency assignments (ICS Form 205 or equivalent) for use when responding to events and incidents within the state.

1.4.1.2. Incident Commanders will familiarize themselves with this Communications Operations Plan and ensure that proper use of these channels is accomplished to ensure that interoperability exists. The 6 CONOPS Channels are licensed by the State of Maine or statewide agencies (Me Fire Chief's Assoc, Maine EMS, etc.) for mobile and portable radio use statewide. They will be utilized for on-scene interoperable communications at the direction of the Incident Commander when a CONOPS operation has been authorized..

1.4.1.3. The Incident Commander or designated representative, which may be the Communications Unit Leader (CommL), or a dispatcher, will assign talk-around channels as needed ,based upon the nature of the event or incident.

1.4.3. All public safety agencies should establish Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with their neighboring communities for the purpose of confirming the implementation of this CONOPS.

1.4.4. Interoperability with agencies operating on frequencies outside the common VHF High Band spectrum will be resolved using available technologies. MEMA will help provide technical guidance to determine the best practical technical solutions, help with implementation of technological solutions and will provide assistance with grant applications and obtaining funds from other sources when applicable and available.

1.4.5. Non-traditional public safety agencies will have communications capabilities with first responders through the Incident Commander.

1.4.6. The selection and use of CONOPS channels will be determined by the Incident Commander.

1.4.6.1. When multiple units are engaged in a common incident, talk-around channels should be implemented.

SECTION 2 – INTEROPERABILITY OPERATIONS

2.1. EMPLOYMENT. Maine's Homeland Security Interoperability working group (Objective 3) has identified the need for developing this program to provide interoperability between all traditional public safety agencies (Law Enforcement, Fire and EMS) on a regular basis and non-traditional public safety agencies (ex: USCG, FBI, National Guard, DOT, DPW, REMIS, Utilities, etc.) during major events, emergencies and disasters.

2.1.1. The purpose of CONOPS is not to change how local agencies use the CONOPS frequencies on a day to day basis. The CONOPS agreement is to allow for temporary use of these frequencies during up scale incidents.

2.2. IMPLEMENTATION: Maine Emergency Management Agency will provide listings of frequencies/ channels and guidance for their use throughout the state.

2.2.1. Partnerships already developed between public safety agencies will assist in implementing this interoperability program. Mutual aid agreements should include the CONOPS implementation as part of the agreement.

2.2.1.1. Once all agencies' radios have been equipped with the common talk-around channels and personnel are trained, this CONOPS will be ready for full implementation. MEMA will provide training guidance and coordinate an awareness campaign for both traditional and non-traditional responders.

2.2.1.2. This CONOPS plan authorizes the installation of the CONOPS frequencies in mobile and portable radios of traditional and non-traditional first responder organizations. The installation of the CONOPS frequencies in base stations is beyond the authority of this plan.

2.2.1.3. This program will be successful only if we have 100 percent participation in the CONOPS program.

SECTION 3 – TRAINING

3.1. GENERAL. The overriding goal of this initiative is to provide the best possible capability to incident commanders for management of their resources while ensuring that all agencies can communicate with one another on several state wide common talk-around channels which in turn will provide interoperability between all agencies while freeing up dispatch channels for what they are intended for.

3.2. TRAINING REQUIREMENTS: Training all public safety personnel is critical to the success of this CONOPS. Dispatchers, first responders, incident commanders and field supervisors must be trained in this concept, and implement it on a daily basis during responses and training exercises. Regular use of talk-around channels will make this second nature to first responders.

3.3. TRAINING SUPPORT: Agency chiefs, incident commanders, field supervisors and communications managers must ensure that this concept is part of regular training and is included in all exercises as well as implemented in normal day to day operations. Maine Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) will help coordinate and identify sources of fund to support training requirements if training is outside the agency's normal training requirements.

SECTION 4 – Use of the Six CONOPS Frequencies

The table below lists the six frequencies to be used during a CONOPS scenario. These are not new frequencies, obviously, as there are no new VHF frequencies available to Maine at this time. The leadership of the primary responder agencies associated with each frequency has signed a collaborative agreement to allow for CONOPS activation/temporary reallocation of these frequencies during a CONOPS event. The authority for activating CONOPS is the Director of MEMA. Upon request by an incident commander for use of CONOPS frequencies, a request is made to the MEMA director. The MEMA director is the sole and final authority for approving a CONOPS request.

Day-to-Day Frequency (Permanent Assignment)		
1. SWSP	154.710	State Wide State Police
2. NWCC	155.475	Nation Wide Car to Car
3. EMS/LASAR	155.160	Emergency Medical Services/ Land/Air Search & Rescue
4. SPCC	154.935	State Police Car to Car
5. SWF	154.310	State Fire
6. SWCC	154.695	State Wide Car to Car

Agencies that do not currently have these frequencies programmed into their mobile and portable radios may now include these for use in a CONOPS contingency situation. These frequencies may then be used during a CONOPS incident when the incident commander has gained authority from the MEMA director.

Guidance Criteria for MEMA Director to Authorizing Use of CONOPS Frequencies

Should an event occur that meets or exceeds 3 of the following 4 criteria the incident commander may request a "Con-Ops" authorization to support their operations.

> ➢ An event/incident involving response from four (4) or more agencies
> ➢ An event/incident involving a duration of at least six (6) or more hours
> ➢ An event/incident involving response from at least three (3) levels of government
> ➢ An event/incident where normal use of common simplex (local talk-a-round) channels will not support the incident commanders needs

Procedure for an incident commander to request authorization for CONOPS

Step 1: The incident commander calls MEMA at 1-800-452-8735 or 207-624-4400 to make the request to the MEMA Director, or their designee (the lines are available 24/7/365). Be prepared to identify yourself **summarize the situation, request specific frequencies, identify the incident inbound calling freq., and give contact information.**
The MEMA contact will immediately engage the MEMA Director for decision-making.

Step 2: The MEMA Director will consider the request and approve or disapprove in accordance with the criteria listed in this CONOPS document. (The decision criteria are guidelines and therefore flexible. In the After-Action review, the guidelines may be modified by the signatories to this agreement. The purpose is to remain open, assimilate lessons learned, and to be better prepared for future events.)

Step 3: When the MEMA Director authorizes CONOPS , MEMA will request that State of Maine Public Safety Dispatch immediately issue a teletype requesting a general broadcast alert for the region where the incident is occurring. Additionally, it shall be included in the information to be broadcast, which channel has been designated as the in-bound frequency for all units responding to the incident. Once on scene, in-bound units will be redirected to the appropriate frequency by the incident commander, or their designee. MEMA will also notify the incident commander when this has occurred. The teletype will also indicate the name, position title, organization, and contact information for the incident commander to whom the authority has been granted; the purpose of the CONOPS authorization; and the location of the incident.

Step 4: All communications centers within the incident region shall immediately broadcast that a CONOPS incident is in effect, and shall indicate the inbound calling frequency and which channels the Incident Commander has requested so that responders know what channels are now dedicated to the incident commander in charge of that incident.

Step 5: As the incident escalates, or deescalates the incident commander may again call MEMA to adjust the request. If the CONOPS authorization is no longer required, the incident commander will contact MEMA to request a stand-down of the CONOPS, which in turn will be broadcast by MEMA to all pertinent stations.

Step 6: Upon completion of an authorized CONOPS event, the MEMA Director will ensure that an after-action review (AAR) is conducted within a reasonable time. The purpose will be to review the CONOPS process and procedures and to modify the plan as necessary to ensure improved performance for future events.

SECTION 5 – SUMMARY

This CONOPS provides incident commanders, first responders and dispatchers with a much more effective and efficient way to communicate with one another during upscale public safety operations. No longer do interoperability issues block the effective deployment and employment of first responders. Incident related communications, primarily handled on talk-around channels, leave dispatch channels available to handle the on going activities in the communities. Command and control of first responders at the scene becomes much more effective and reliable. The ability to dedicate channels to specific functions at an incident will be possible once this CONOPS is implemented. This CONOPS will help ensure that *"no man, woman or child ever loses his or her life because public safety officials cannot talk to one another*

This is a living document, and intended to be amended as necessary after each CONOPS after-action review and/or when changing technologies allow for new opportunities to solve the interoperability problems.