

Office of Emergency Communications (OEC)

An Overview of the Communications Unit



Homeland
Security



Course Objective

To provide an overview of the Communications Unit within the ICS structure.

We will discuss the:

- ICS model as it applies to expansion and delegation
- necessity for communications support in incident management
- organizational components and structure of the Communications Unit
- current status of the COMU development in NIMS
- availability of trained personnel and how to obtain COMU Training



Why the Communications Unit?

- It has been common knowledge in Incident Management that responders require reliable and sustainable communication to perform their assigned function effectively and *safely*



This is not a issue of incident scale or size, but of complexity



When do I order communications support?

- When you need it!
- A basic tenet of ICS is “Span of Control”. Order help as it is needed. It is not always obvious.



- A three vehicle crash?
- A narcotics task force serving warrants?
- A St. Patrick's Day Parade?
- A major weather system approaching?



Obstacles & Solutions

- The jurisdictional diversity and technical complexity of incident response can quickly overwhelm routine communications
- The Communications Unit is tasked with managing the *operational* and *technical* aspects of incident communications. As an incident grows, communications needs expand quickly





Who does the COMU Support?



- Everyone. The COMU provides critical support to all functions of the ICS organization.
- The increasing requirement for radio, data, telephone and video even on moderate sized incidents has raised the bar for technology and *coordination*.





How is the COMU Structured?

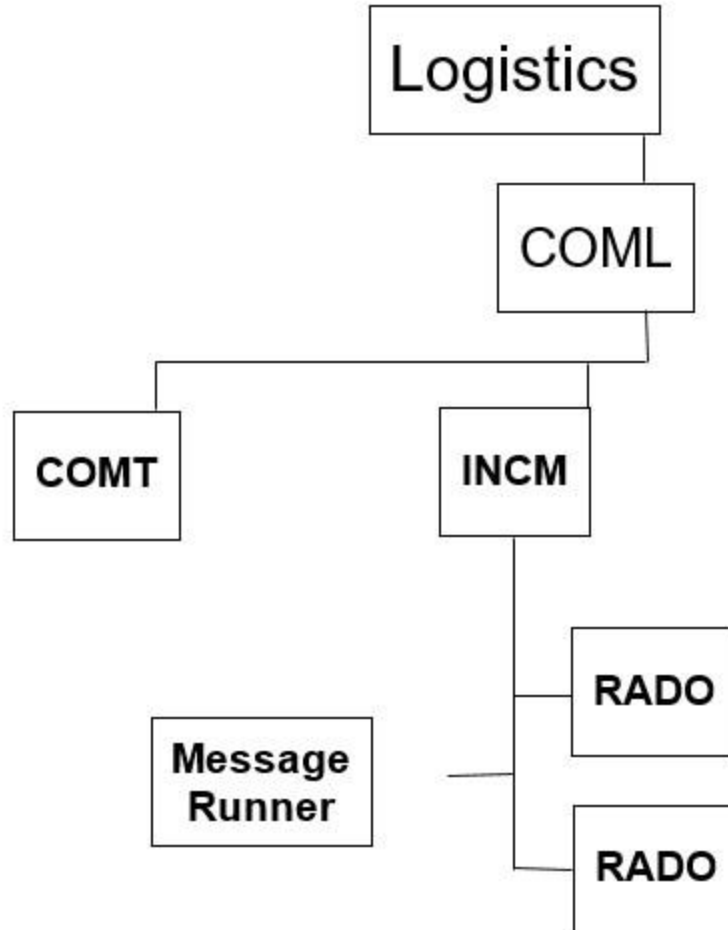
The Comm Unit is built against need. There are several positions in the basic structure, but they are filled “as required”.

Here are the positions:

- Communications Unit Leader (COML)
- Communications Technician (COMT)
- Incident Communications Center Manager (INCM)
- Radio Operator (RADO)
- Technical Specialist (THSP)



A Simple Organizational Chart





COMU Positions

The Communications Unit Leader (COML)

- The COML provides for the operational and technical communications needs of the incident. This position provides oversight and supervision for the unit.
- The COML is involved with incident planning and provides the Communications Plan ICS-205 component for the Incident Action Plan (IAP).
- The COML works directly for the Logistics Section Chief, but regularly interacts at all levels of the ICS structure to coordinate communications.



COMU Positions

Communications Technician (COMT)

- The COMT provides the technical skills to implement required equipment and systems needed. The COMT also assists the COML in designing the system needs for the incident.
- The COMT can support radio, data, telephone, satellite or other systems as available or required





COMU Positions

Incident Communications Center Manager (INCM)

- When the nature of the incident requires dispatching in the field (staffing a communications or command vehicle or a outlying facility) the INCM is tasked to manage the field communications center (ICC). This position supervises the Radio Operators.
- The INCM has proven to be a significant asset in managing field communications.



COMU Positions

Radio Operators (RADO)

- The position of RADO is evolving. The RADO was seen as a simple function, however incident complexity is requiring a more developed skill set and experience.
- This position is commonly filled with tactical dispatchers or incident dispatchers
- There is no formal training for this position at this time.



COMU Positions

Technical Specialist (THSP)

THSP is a catch-all title for skills and abilities not identified in other ICS positions. In the Comm, Unit, THSP are often needed when enhanced or specialized skills are required.

Common request for THSP's are:

- Data or IT specialists
- Satellite specialists
- Gateway specialists



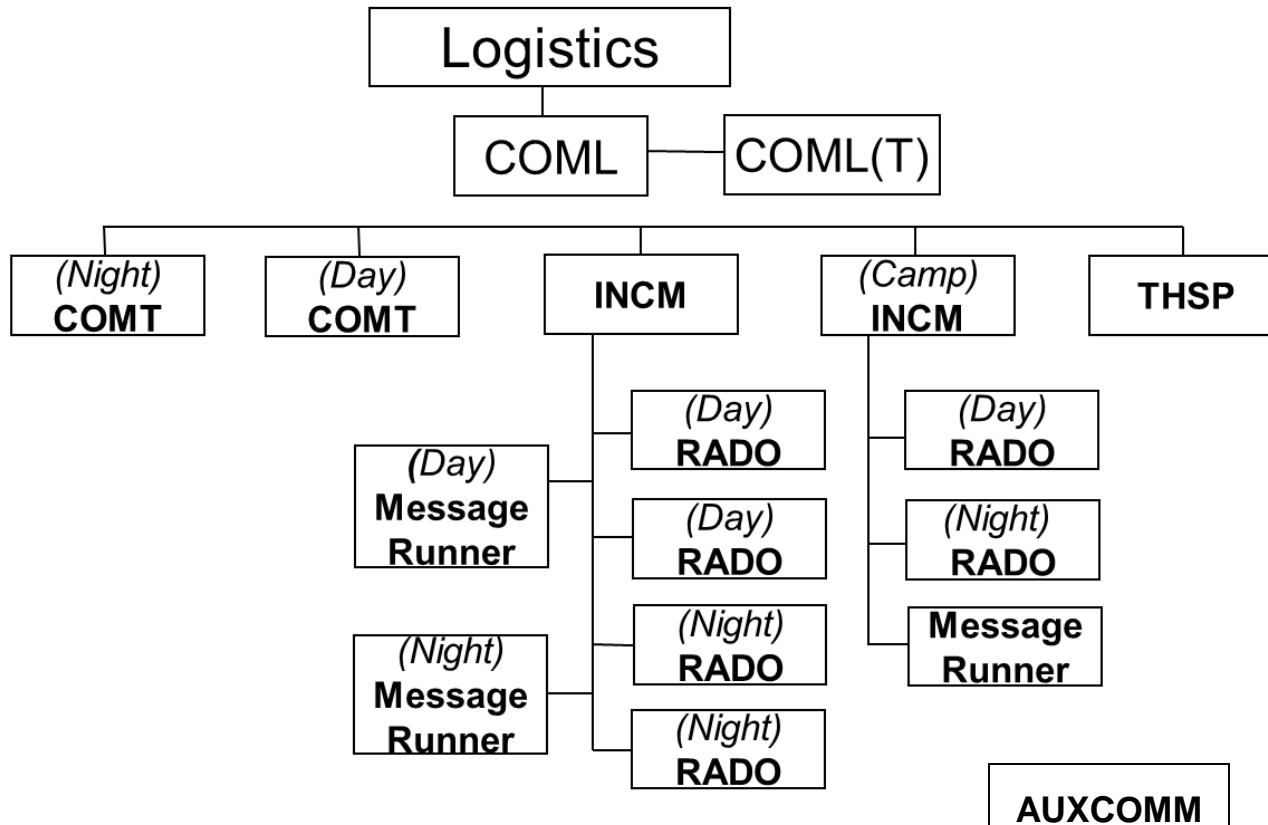
COMU Positions

Auxiliary Communications (AUXCOMM)

- AUXCOMM is not a standard ICS position but is made up of amateur radio operators that provide auxiliary support to emergency management.
- AUXCOMM personnel are commonly utilized in Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs). AUXCOMM personnel are often used in catastrophic events when communications infrastructure has failed or has been compromised.



A Complex Organizational Chart





Where are we in the COMU Development?

- In response to UASI needs, the All Hazard COML position in ICS was done by OEC. The first course was in 2007.
- The curriculum was designed by responders with backgrounds in incident communications. Practitioners from law enforcement, EMS, fire, and emergency management were central to the course design.
- Since 2007 over 4000 COMLs have been trained in the 50 states and territories.



Where are we in the COMU Development?

- In the last few years, FEMA's Emergency Management Institute (EMI) has begun completing additional All Hazard ICS positions. OEC and EMI have partnered to incorporate the OEC COML course into the standard NIMS format. The COML position delivery is now managed through the EMI system.
- The Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (SWICs) now work in partnership with the State Training Officers to coordinate COML Training



What's Next?



- The COML, COMT, and AUXCOMM curriculum have recently been updated
- The COML Instructor course has been redesigned
- The COMT Instructor Course has been created
- All of these new courses and revisions should be implemented by the Fall of 2012



How do we get this training?

Assistance is available through OEC to develop or enhance a planning and sustainment program within your state for the Communications Unit. Go to the OEC Technical Assistance Catalog and look for Communications Unit Training and Support for more information. <https://www.dhs.gov/safecom>



Who is available in my state?

- At this time, there is no federal credentialing for NIMS ICS. Qualifications are set on a state-by-state basis against a national standard.
- Contact your State's Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC) to identify qualified COMLs & COMTs.



Questions?

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