





POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

	COMMUNICATIONS	
	POLICY NUMBER: 81-1	ISSUING AUTHORITY 
	EFFECTIVE DATE: June 12, 2025	Christine A. Elow Police Commissioner

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES

The basic function of the communications system in the police department is to satisfy immediate daily information needs and during emergencies. The system connects the Cambridge community to a network of personnel who respond to calls for assistance and provide a wide variety of other public safety services. The system provides information storage and retrieval capabilities. The speed and accuracy with which information flows from one part of the network to another can be a measure of the department's response capabilities in both emergency and non-emergency situations.

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the City of Cambridge's Emergency Communications Department (ECD) to:

- A. provide, maintain, and secure the communications equipment and functions needed to support police and other services for the City;
- B. respond in the event of an unusual occurrence, such as a large scale natural or man-made disaster, that places significant stress on the operating system including personnel; and
- C. comply with all local, state, and federal regulations related to communications operations.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. **ALARS**: The Automated License and Registrations System that provides license and registration information from the Registry of Motor Vehicles as well as driver histories.
- B. **DCJIS**: The Massachusetts Department of Criminal Justice Information Services.
- C. **EMD**: Emergency Medical Dispatch, which allows trained dispatch personnel to gather information and provide guidance over the phone in life-threatening emergencies until first responders arrive at the scene.

- E. *NCIC*: The National Crime Information Center located in Washington, D.C. that provides information on wanted persons and missing or stolen property.
- F. *NLETS*: The National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System, a high-speed switching system that provides access to other states' information systems.
- G. *TDD*: Telecommunications Device for the Deaf.
- H. *WMS*: The Massachusetts Warrant Management System.

IV. PROCEDURES

- A. 81.1.1 (M) Agreements, Shared/Regional Facility
 - 1. The City of Cambridge Emergency Communications Department is an independent department serving both police and fire departments for the City. It does not share responsibilities or have agreements with other jurisdictions.
- B. 81.1.2 (M) Operations Meet FCC Requirements
 - 1. The ECD shall keep current Federal Communications Commission licenses and all other applicable regulatory agency licenses.
- C. 81.2.1 (M) 24-Hour, Toll-Free Service
 - 1. The ECD shall operate the Massachusetts State 911 Department 24-hour, toll-free voice, text, and TDD telephone access or an equivalent system for emergency calls for service (E911).
- D. 81.2.2 (M) Continuous, Two-Way Capability
 - 1. The City shall provide continuous two-way communications capability between the ECD and the officers on duty.
- E. 81.2.3 (M) Recording Information
 - 1. The department shall comply with M.G.L. c. 41, § 98F regarding obtaining and recording information of each request for service or self-initiated activity.
 - 2. M.G.L. c. 41, § 98F requires each police department in the Commonwealth to make, keep, and maintain a daily log written in a form that can be easily understood. All entries in the log shall, unless otherwise provided in the law, be public records available without charge to the public during regular business hours and at all other reasonable times.
 - 3. Each request for service, whether by telephone, letter, email, in-person, personal device, or self-initiated activity by officers, shall be documented in the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) System, which allows for a permanent record to be maintained. Incident entries are the primary responsibility of dispatch; however, responding officers have access to the system and on occasion may enter additional information that is recorded on the CAD Incident as a CAD Note. Entries shall include:

- a. control number assigned and attached to control record;
 - b. date and time of request;
 - c. name and address of caller/complainant, if possible;
 - d. type of incident reported;
 - e. location of incident reported;
 - f. identification of officer(s) assigned;
 - g. time of dispatch;
 - h. time of officer arrival;
 - i. time of officer return to service; and
 - j. disposition or status report of the incident.
4. Dispatchers are encouraged to elicit as much information as possible to help officers in the field and to enhance their safety.

F. 81.2.4 (M) Radio Communications Procedures

1. Officers shall communicate with dispatch or other officers by mobile radio located in the cruiser or by the portable radio assigned to them. Officers may communicate by cell phone or landline when information conveyed is of a sensitive nature, investigative in scope, or may jeopardize the safety of the officer or others. Officers should contact dispatch any time there is a public safety or officer safety concern; upon initiating a field stop; when there is a change of status including breaks; when enroute to a new location; and in any other circumstance the officer believes important to convey.
2. Officers shall inform dispatch when they are out of service. The status of officers when out of service is noted in the CAD system.
3. All officers of the department are assigned a three-digit badge number. This number shall be used to identify officers during communications when off duty or on a detail. Dispatch shall be referred to as *control*. Officers with permanent assignments will be identified by their designated call sign. Officers assigned to a patrol unit shall be identified by their assignment during their shift.
4. The dispatch console, cruiser, and portable radios shall be programmed to allow for communications with other law enforcement agencies. This capability includes BAPERN, area wide three, the BAPERN Central District, and others. The Arlington Police Department is the coordinating department for the Central Tactical District and as such will conduct both scheduled and unscheduled checks of the Central District's Tactical Channels.
5. Dispatchers are prompted by the CAD system regarding the initial number of field officers needed for each call for service based on the seriousness and nature of the call, the number

of officers available, and the need to provide backup. A patrol supervisor has the authority to alter the number of personnel assigned if necessary.

6. A patrol supervisor shall be dispatched to all priority calls identified as such on a list provided by the Police Commissioner and maintained by ECD for the purpose of assuming command.
7. In an emergency, officers may activate the alarm on their portable or cruiser radios and request assistance. Dispatch shall immediately attempt to contact the officer and provide assistance as necessary. If unable to contact the officer, the dispatcher will identify the officer in trouble and send available units to respond based on the officer's last known location.

G. 81.2.5 (M) Access to Resources

1. Communications personnel shall have immediate access to the following departmental resources.
 - a. ECD supervisors shall have immediate contact capabilities with the Shift Commander. In most cases, a lieutenant will be the Shift Commander and will be in continual contact with ECD.
 - b. A duty roster of all officers shall be available at the dispatch console and at the front desk. The roster will be maintained and updated by the Shift Commander.
 - c. A list of all department personnel, including their personal cell and/or home telephone numbers shall be maintained electronically by the Office of Planning, Budget, and Personnel. This list shall be made available to dispatch and will be entered into the *Conveyant Operator System* for easy access.
 - d. Visual maps of the department service area showing sufficient detail and delineation between sectors shall be available to communications personnel.
 - e. Officers in the field should keep dispatch advised of their status and all changes in their status, including advising dispatch when responding to, present at, or clearing a call, informing dispatch of all motor vehicle and field stops, and informing dispatch when out of service.
 - f. Dispatchers shall have access to telephone numbers and procedures for contacting emergency and non-emergency external services. Telephone numbers for Cambridge Police duty personnel, telephone numbers for other City agencies (i.e. Department of Public Works, Cambridge Fire Department, Cambridge Electrical Department, etc.), telephone numbers for public safety partners statewide, telephone numbers for medical services, mental health services, and other helpful telephone numbers will be maintained in the ECD's Conveyant telephone directory, which is available at every console in the ECD. Dispatchers also have access to the Language Line, which provides 24-hour access to translators to assist with translation issues.
 - g. Dispatchers shall have immediate access to tactical dispatching plans, which will be available electronically via ECD Intranet as well as physical paper copies located at the

tactical operations console in the ECD call center. The plans will include procedures for bomb threats, fire alarms, as well as dispatch procedures for emergencies with toxic, biohazard, or explosive potential.

H. 81.2.6 (M) Calls for Service or Information; Victim/Witness Calls

1. All dispatchers shall be trained in the APCO Institute Public Safety Telecommunicator (PST1) Course, Priority Dispatch Emergency Medical Dispatch, and Massachusetts Next Generation-911 Equipment Training as required by the Massachusetts State 911 Department. The training will include best practice for responding to calls.
2. Module 11 of the PST1 Course, Call Classification, specifically addresses skills in judging the characteristics of a call to determine whether an emergency or non-emergency exists and the requirements of the response. Other related modules include Interpersonal Communications, Radio Communications Techniques, and Call Processing. All communications center personnel will make every effort to properly handle calls from the beginning of the shift to the end of the shift while serving in the capacity of call taker.
3. Calls received on an emergency line shall be answered with the 911-required greeting, *911, this call is recorded; what is the address of your emergency?*
4. Calls received on a non-emergency line shall be answered with *Cambridge Police Communications, this line is recorded* and the dispatcher's name. Based on the caller's response the dispatcher shall determine whether an emergency response is required. Some factors to consider include the nature of the incident, its location, and time of occurrence.
5. The dispatcher or front desk officer should inform the caller regarding the department's response and/or a referral to another agency. Referral options are available to communications personnel in the CAD system.
6. Requests for information regarding the rights and responsibilities of victims and witnesses, in most cases, will be referred to the Cambridge Police Department.
7. When a person calls the emergency or business phone line and self identifies as a victim or a witness, communications personnel shall attempt to learn if there is a need for an immediate or prompt police response. If so, dispatch shall initiate a police response.
8. If dispatch concludes that no immediate response is required, the victim or witness may be referred to the most appropriate police department unit or to an outside agency when appropriate.

I. 81.2.7 (M) Recording and Playback

1. The ECD shall have immediate playback capabilities of recorded telephone and radio conversations while maintaining continuous recording of all radio transmissions and emergency telephone conversations.
2. Radio transmissions on select police talkgroups on the city's trunked radio system and all incoming and outgoing telephone calls from ECD and the front desk, business, or emergency,

shall be recorded and retained for at least thirty days and available for immediate access if necessary. All recordings shall be archived and kept for at least one year (M.G.L. c. 6A, §18G). Emergency Call Detail Records shall be retained for a period of not less than three (3) years. (M.G.L. c. 6A, §§ A-F)

3. The Emergency Communications Director is responsible for the security and integrity of all recordings.
 4. Access to recorded communications is restricted by password protection.
 5. Recordings reside on a server owned by the City of Cambridge.
 6. Access to the server is restricted to the Emergency Communications Department administrative personnel.
 7. Video and voice recordings may be accessed by those employees with the proper authority and training, and only in accordance with their job duties. Access to recordings provided to outside parties per court order, public records requests, or discovery shall be handled in accordance with department policy on records requests or discovery.
 8. In most situations, other than during an on-going investigation, detectives and sergeant detectives may release recordings to external law enforcement agencies for investigative purposes and to the court upon request.
- J. 81.2.8 (M) Local/State/Federal CJI Systems
1. The ECD shall participate in and have access to all available local, state, and federal criminal justice information systems.
- K. 81.2.9(M) Alternative Methods of Communication
1. The primary methods of communication are the portable radio assigned to each officer and the in-cruiser mobile radio.
 2. All other methods of communication are secondary. These include cell phones and other devices such as tablets and laptops.
- L. 81.2.10 (M) Emergency Messages
1. Upon receiving a request from a community member, hospital, police, or other source to deliver an emergency message, such as in the case of a death, injury, or serious illness, communications personnel shall attempt to ascertain the following information.
 - a. Full name and any other identifying information about the person to be notified.
 - b. Full name and call-back number of the person conveying the message.
 - c. The nature of the message.
 2. This information will be relayed to the Shift Commander, who will make the decision to contact the person by phone or to have an officer dispatched for notification in person.
- M. 81.2.11 (M) Misdirected Emergency Calls

1. In the event a caller mistakenly reaches the Cambridge ECD, and the call requires an immediate response by a different jurisdiction, dispatch shall take all pertinent information and relay the call to the appropriate agency. The dispatcher may have the caller remain on the line while the appropriate agency is being contacted.
2. Non-emergency calls that mistakenly reach the Cambridge ECD shall be transferred to the appropriate agency. To facilitate the transfer of these calls, a directory of telephone numbers for neighboring departments shall be maintained and easily accessible in the ECD including police departments near or associated with the City of Cambridge.

N. 81.2.12 (M) Private Security Alarms

1. The ECD does not monitor private security alarms. A private business or residence seeking to have a security alarm installed must request a commercial alarm company to service and monitor their premises.
2. Upon notification by phone of a private security alarm activation, ECD personnel will dispatch appropriate units to investigate and follow up on the alarm.
3. False alarm billing is handled by the Records Unit.

O. 81.2.13 (M) First Aid Over Phone

1. The ECD utilizes the Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS) in handling emergency medical calls under the guidance and direction of a Medical Director as prescribed by The International Academies of Emergency Dispatch (IAED). All dispatchers and dispatch supervisors shall utilize the MPDS protocols when processing calls for service of a medical nature as required by the Massachusetts State 911 Department Regulations 560 CMR 5.00.
2. To maintain the most up-to-date protocols, the most recent versions of the IAED Dispatch MPDS and Performance Standards will be implemented within three (3) to six (6) months of the release date.
3. All dispatchers and dispatch supervisors must be trained and certified in Priority Dispatch's Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) course upon hire and recertified biennially in accordance with the IAED's Certification/Recertification Requirements.
4. All dispatchers and dispatch supervisors must be CPR-certified upon hire and recertified biennially to maintain their EMD certification and remain in good standing with the department.
5. All calls for service requesting an Emergency Medical Services (EMS) response must be processed utilizing the PRO-QA Paramount MPDS Software. If Pro-QA is unavailable, call takers must use the EMD card set to process the incident.
6. All ECD personnel must comply with IAED's Continuing Dispatch Education (CDE) requirements:
 - a. EMD: Twenty-four hours of continuing dispatch education training every two years.

- b. EMD-Q: Thirty hours of continuing dispatch education training every two years.
- P. 81.3.1 (M) Communications Center Security
 - 1. Security measures for the ECD shall:
 - a. limit access to authorized personnel only;
 - b. protect equipment;
 - c. provide for back-up resources; and
 - d. provide security for transmission lines, antennas, and power sources.
- Q. 81.3.2 (M) Alternate Power Source
 - 1. The Robert W. Healy Public Safety Facility has a back-up power battery system and a generator located on the 6th floor. This equipment is sufficient to provide continued operation of emergency communication equipment in the event of the failure of the primary power source.
 - 2. A documented inspection and test of the alternate power source shall be completed at least monthly, or in conformance with manufacturer recommendations, and tested or operated under full load at least once a year.
- R. 81.3.3 (M) Mobile/Portable Radios
 - 1. The ECD maintains multichannel mobile and/or portable radio equipment capable of two-way operation on a joint public safety frequency or frequencies.