



## **FIREScope Safety Specialist Group Emergency Traffic Guidelines**

The FIREScope Specialist Group (Group) requests that the State Fire Training Division of the Office of the State Fire Marshal (Training) revise its use of the term “Mayday” and return to the use of “Emergency Traffic” as the initial attention phrase in the event of an emergency. Our Group is aware that other areas of the country are using “Mayday” as the initial notification that there is a problem, but based upon the reliance on clear text, we feel that there is a significant potential for delay as a critical life-threatening emergency unfold. Our Group is aware that Training has incorporated the use of “Mayday” in at least three newly revised DRAFT training manuals: Rapid Intervention Crew Tactics, Command and Control, and Fire Fighter Survival.

The extensive use of Mayday first showed up during nautical and aeronautical emergencies. While “Mayday” is being used by emergency personnel on the east coast as the designator to clear the radio, California fire services have routinely trained and used “Emergency Traffic” for that purpose. California’s use of the term is not alone, as NFPA 1500 and 1561 both rely exclusively on the use of “Emergency Traffic” in the notification of an emergency.

The specific reasons that we believe the curriculum should be revised are listed below:

1. The term mayday provides no clear description of the nature of the problem, and advocating the use of “Mayday” only delays defining the type of a life-threatening emergency. In addition mayday is recognized as a distress call reserved for nautical and aeronautical emergencies, which could confuse personnel working in a unified command with agencies having nautical or aeronautical assets. The term “Mayday” can truly be considered a code word.
  - a. Examples where Aeronautical and Nautical emergencies could and did occur simultaneously
    - i. Jesusita Fire- Santa Barbara County
    - ii. Zaca Fire- Santa Barbara County
    - iii. Topanga Fire- Los Angeles County
2. The use of Mayday can still be taught in the class as a hailing call but the precursor utilized to create the pause at an emergency incident and declare the type of emergency will be “Emergency Traffic”. ICS is based on common operational procedures, using common language to assure efficient emergency operations and personnel safety. This use of clear text is one of the fundamental of ICS and is already recognized by the following documents and agencies that had instrumental input to putting these recommendations into policy.

- a. FIREScope ICS 910-1: Accepted and utilized by Contract Counties, CAL EMA, CAL-FIRE, numerous CA fire agencies.
  - b. NFPA 1561 (In the chapter, it states that Mayday could be used, but that because of the potential of confusion with nautical and aeronautical emergencies, the use should be avoided).
  - c. NFPA 1500 Chapter 8 (In the annex of the standard, Mayday is addressed and it is stated that mayday should not be used for fireground communications).
  - d. FIREScope Field Operations Guide (FOG) 420-1
  - e. National Interagency Management System (NIMS)
3. The use of “Emergency Traffic” was utilized in the (2) most recent fatality fires in California.
- a. Los Angeles Fire Department
  - b. San Francisco Fire Department
4. In the manuals and curriculum for Firefighter Survival, Command and Control, and Rapid Intervention Crew Tactics, the only mention of the term “Emergency Traffic” is located in the glossary/terminology section and is incorrectly listed as “Emergency Radio Traffic”. It also appears that the entire California curriculum from here on in as it relates to the calling of an emergency situation is being driven by a couple of articles from Firehouse Magazine.
- a. The correct terminology “Emergency Traffic” should be referenced and explained early in the training/document (in the introduction and then throughout the document and then utilized during scenario based training). The information should be put into all three DRAFT documents. Fire department personnel attending these classes might only be taking one or two classes so consistency and use of the terminology needs to be maintained to achieve qualitative and quantitative training.

The Safety Specialist Group feels very strong that without a clear direction on this important matter, there could be some confusion which could result in a tragic outcome. The use of “Emergency Traffic” is well entrenched in the training and practices of departments throughout the state. The system seems to be working well and fortunately is not put into actual use all that often, but practiced constantly. While change can be a good thing, in this case it appears that the current system is working and in use by all. Our Group would welcome working with anyone on this matter if that would be of value.