
Unit 3: The Communications Unit

INSTRUCTOR GUIDE

Objectives

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- Describe the function and components of the Communications Unit and qualification process for the Communications Unit Leader
- Identify positions within the Communications Unit
- Describe responsibilities of positions within the Communications Unit

Methodology

This unit uses lecture and discussion based activities.

Knowledge of unit content will be evaluated through administration of the final exam (to be administered upon completion of the course). Instructors will evaluate students' initial understanding through facilitation of Exercise 3.

The purpose of this unit is to provide students with an orientation to the Communications Unit.

Time Plan

A suggested time plan for this unit is shown below. More or less time may be required, based on the experience level of the group.

| Topic | Time |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Lesson | 1 hour, 30 minutes |
| Total Time | 1 hour, 30 minutes |

Reference Materials

- Projector & other equipment as necessary for PowerPoint presentation
- Easel chart/Easel pad
- Marking pens

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TopicUnit Title Slide

**Explain the Following Key Points**

Announce unit and quickly move to next slide.

This unit focuses on the responsibilities of the COML at a high level. Many topics discussed here will be detailed in later units.

This unit will provide a general understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the COML and the Communications Unit.

Topic Unit Terminal Objective



Explain the Following Key Points

Introduce and explain the Unit Terminal Objective to the class.

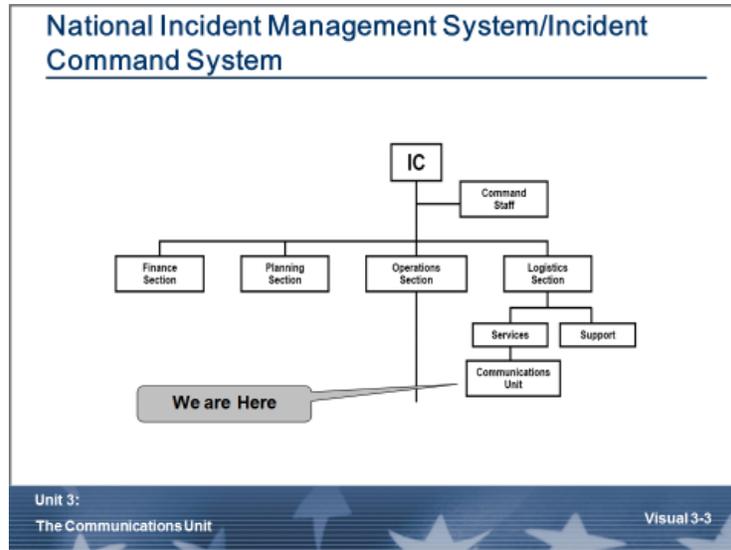
Unit Terminal Objective

At the end of this unit, students will be able to describe the function and components of the Communications Unit.

Unit Enabling Objectives

- Identify positions within the Communications Unit
- Describe responsibilities of positions within the Communications Unit

Topic National Incident Management System/Incident Command System

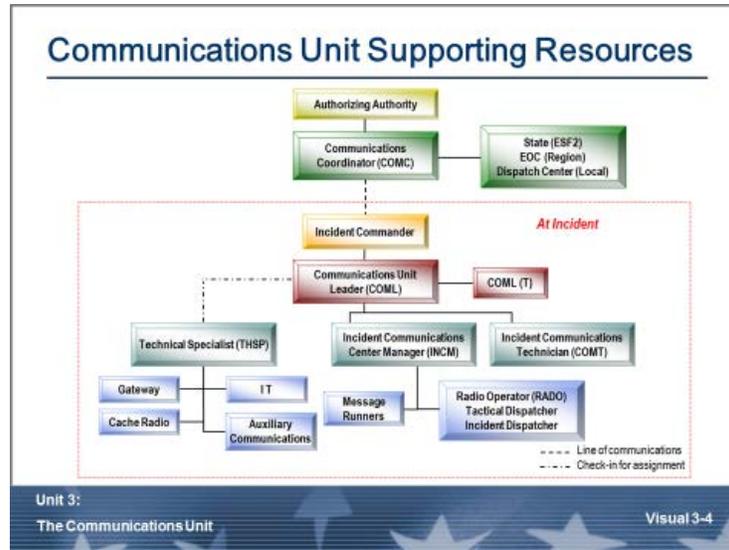


Explain the Following Key Points

Identify where the COML fits in the organization.

The COML works for the Service Branch, under Logistics. Only extremely large incidents are likely to have a Service Branch. Who does the Communications Unit support? The entire ICS structure – not just Operations.

The COML must have an integral working knowledge of ICS.



Explain the Following Key Points

Introduce students to the Communications Unit supporting resources.

One of the most important officials the COML must contact is the communications point of contact (POC). This is an unofficial title, and the actual POC may have one of a number of different titles, such as the Communications Coordinator or Communications Duty Officer, an NWCG term that is starting to work its way into the All-Hazards community.

The communications POC is responsible for maintaining contact with all the local agencies that use radios and may potentially have to work together at some point on an incident. The communications POC will collect this information and remain familiar with local resources to aid and enable the COML.

The communications POC will help with such tasks as assigning equipment and frequencies and following up on and keeping track of the status of orders. Adjacent incidents using similar resources and units that pose potential interoperability problems must be monitored by the communications POC.

The communications POC must verify the incident location and maintain knowledge of local equipment availability such as pre-positioned equipment, cache locations, and equipment given to shortage.

The communications POC will ultimately determine the extent and availability of communications coordination possible for a given incident.

Do not confuse with the NIFC Communications Coordinator (COMC), which is assigned by NIICD. This is not the COML's line of authority. These are relationships that the COML has with external communications structures.

Locally the Communications Center Manager, Dispatch Center Supervisor, or Local Frequency Coordinator may function as the communications coordinator and coordinate local and regional communication assets.

The communications POC/CDO/COMC helps with:

- Equipment assignments
- Frequency assignments (repeaters, links, aircraft, tactical)
- Status of orders (preorders, equipment, when ordered, ETA, etc.)
- Adjacent incident information (interoperability issues, frequency assignments, incident locations, contact information)
- Equipment availability (pre-positioned, cache location, shortages)
- Verifying incident location
- Identifying if communications coordination assistance is available

**Explain the Following Key Points**

Announce positions and quickly move to next slide.

Topic Communications Unit Personnel**Explain the Following Key Points**

Briefly introduce the other Communications Unit Personnel; an in-depth explanation of these positions will be discussed later in the course.

To help fulfill all the responsibilities of the Communications Unit, a fully-staffed Communications Unit will feature a number of personnel in a variety of roles. Not all positions must be used on every incident, but the COML may choose from:

- Incident Communications Technician (COMT) - Installs and troubleshoots communications equipment
- Incident Communications Manager (INCM) - Manages an Incident Communications Center, when having the COML do so would present span-of-control issues
- Radio Operator (RADO) - Staffs the ICC, using radios to receive information and relay messages
- Auxiliary Emergency Communicator (AUXCOMM) – This unofficial ICS position supports the operational and technical aspects of the Auxiliary Communications Unit, maintains and/or operates the AUXCOMM network; the knowledge to perform this function applies to every AUXCOMM position
- Technical Specialist - Catch-all term for outside specialists providing expertise to the COML
- Message Runner - Physically relays messages to areas not yet served with any communications system

Communications Unit Leader

- Plans and manages the technical and operational aspects of the communications function during an incident or event
- Prepares Incident Radio Communications Plan (ICS 205)
- Establishes Incident Communications Center (ICC)
- Orders and manages personnel, equipment
- Establishes needed capabilities
- Participates in incident action planning



Unit 3:
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Visual 3-7

Explain the Following Key Points

Briefly introduce some of the tasks the COML is expected to perform. These tasks are described in greater detail later in the course.

The COML is responsible for tasks that include creating a Communications Plan, identifying and ordering the resources needed to implement the plan, setting-up and managing a center for communications, properly documenting all unit activities, and collaborating with the IMT for incident planning.

The COML is responsible for a number of tasks, including:

- Planning and managing the technical and operational aspects of the communications function during an incident or event
- Preparing an Incident Radio Communications Plan (ICS Form 205)
- Establishing an Incident Communications Center (ICC)
- Ordering and managing personnel and equipment
- Establishing needed capabilities
- Participating in incident action planning

Communications Unit Leader (COML)

Duties: As with any ICS position, the COML is responsible for the duties of unfilled subordinate positions (INCM, COMT, THSP, RADO/Tactical Dispatcher) until delegated.



Unit 3:
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Visual 3-8

Explain the Following Key Points

Briefly introduce some of the duties the COML is expected to perform. These duties are described in greater detail later in the course.

The COML is responsible for completing the duties of any organizationally subordinate task he or she has not delegated. Even after delegated, the COML maintains responsibility for overseeing the work of his/her subordinates.

When a Unit Leader does not delegate duties, he/she assumes them.

Topic Incident Communications Center Manager (INCM)

Incident Communications Center Manager (INCM)

Duties:

- Manage the operational aspects of the Communications Unit
- Supervise Radio Operators
- Assists the COML in establishing and maintaining the Incident Communications Center (ICC)



Unit 3:
The Communications Unit

Visual 3-9

Explain the Following Key Points

Briefly introduce some of the duties the INCM is expected to perform.

The INCM is responsible for duties that include the items on the slide. The INCM will often assist the COML in cache management, record keeping, etc.

The INCM is essential to the smooth and efficient operation of an Incident Communications Center. The INCM is critical to managing the RADO staff, who are often from disparate agencies and areas.

Topic Incident Communications Technician (COMT)

Incident Communications Technician (COMT)

The COMT is responsible for supporting the technical activities of the Communications Unit. For example:

- Radio/system coverage
- Radio programming
- Maintenance and repair
- Gateway management
- Cache management



Unit 3:
The Communications Unit

Visual 3-10

Explain the Following Key Points

Briefly introduce some of the tasks the COMT is expected to perform. This position is critical for the implementation of Technical Assets.

The COMT is responsible for tasks that include:

- Radio/system coverage
- Radio programming
- Maintenance and repair
- Gateway management
- Cache management

Topic Incident Communications Technician (COMT)

Incident Communications Technician (COMT)

Duties: Provides for the technical implementation of incident communications systems:

- Provides for equipment distribution
- Tracks equipment
- Trains users on use of equipment
- Verifies proper programming of equipment for incident
- Assists COML in the development of the ICS 205, Incident Radio Communications Plan

Unit 3:
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Visual 3-11

Explain the Following Key Points

Briefly introduce some of the duties the COMT is expected to perform.

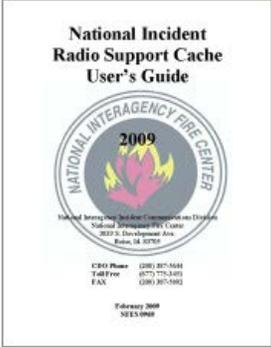
The COMT is responsible for duties that include:

- Provides for equipment distribution
- Tracks equipment
- Trains users on use of equipment
- Verifies proper programming of equipment for incident
- Assists COML in the development of the ICS Form 205, Incident Radio Communications Plan

Topic Incident Communications Technician

Incident Communications Technician (COMT)

Similarly, an NWCG-qualified COMT is responsible for deploying radio cache assets specifically belonging to the National Interagency Incident Communications Division (NIICD) at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho.



Unit 3:
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Visual 3-12

Explain the Following Key Points

Discuss the difference between an NWCG and an All-risk COMT.

RADO

A RADO staffs a radio operator's position at the ICC and is responsible for documenting all radio and telephone messages.



Unit 3:
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Visual 3-13

Explain the Following Key Points

Briefly introduce some of the tasks the RADO is expected to perform.

The RADO is responsible for tasks that include documenting all radio and telephone messages.

In the All-Hazards environment, experienced communicators will be more effective.

Incident Dispatchers and Tactical Dispatchers

Some local agencies have trained public safety dispatchers to work in the field at the incident scene as Incident and/or Tactical Dispatchers who can bring additional training and experience to the ICC.



Unit 3:
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Visual 3-14

Explain the Following Key Points

Briefly introduce the concepts of Incident and Tactical Dispatchers.

Describe the different types of incident/tactical dispatchers.

What EMAC (Emergency Management Assistance Compact) is and what types of resources are available (www.emacweb.org).

- Agreements are in place for the use of resources between states
- EMAC allows for states to assist each other directly without federal declarations
 - May be very useful in making agreements with adjacent states
- All states except Alaska and Hawaii are members of EMAC

As part of completing your Mobilization Guide, determine what local resources are available to you. If Incident Dispatch Teams are not available locally, they are available through EMAC (Emergency Management Assistance Compact). Just like with any resource, you will need to be specific in your request that you want Incident Dispatchers and go through the proper channels.

Topic Technical Specialist (THSP)

Technical Specialists (THSP)

THSP is a “catch-all” position that allows for the formal incorporation of personnel who may not be “qualified” in a specific NIMS/ICS position. For example:

- Information Technology (IT) Specialist
- Local Agency Radio Technicians (not qualified as a COMT)
- Telephone Technicians
- Interoperability Gateway Specialist
- Mobile Communications Center Specialist
- Cache Radio Specialist
- GIS Specialist



Unit 3:
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Visual 3-15

Explain the Following Key Points

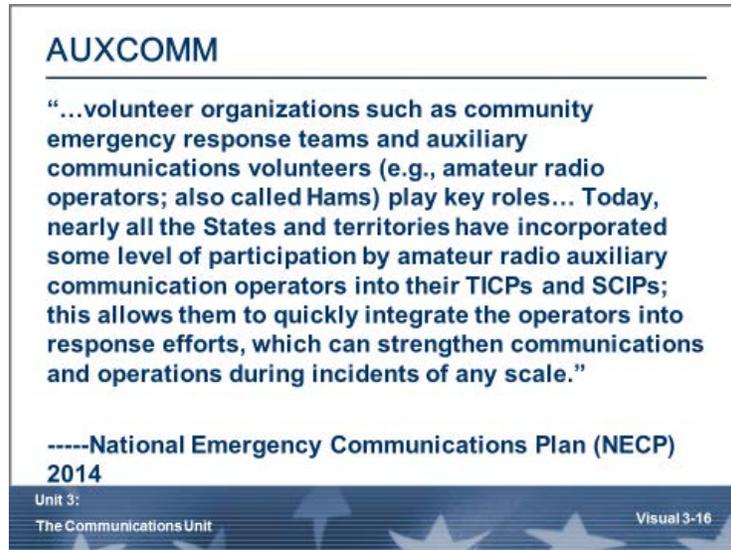
Briefly introduce some of the tasks the THSP is expected to perform.

The THSP is responsible for tasks that include all aspects of the job that you need help with. Do not be afraid to ask for help. No one person can be a complete expert in every possible scenario you may face. Know when you are getting in over your head.

One example of THSP services can be Amateur Radio organizations such as:

- ARES: Amateur Radio Emergency Services
- RACES: Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services
- MARS: Military Affiliate Radio Service

Any amateur resources need to be trained and they need to be disaster service workers (covers for insurance purposes).

Topic Auxiliary Communications (AUXCOMM)**Explain the Following Key Points**

Briefly introduce some of the tasks the AUXCOMM is expected to perform.

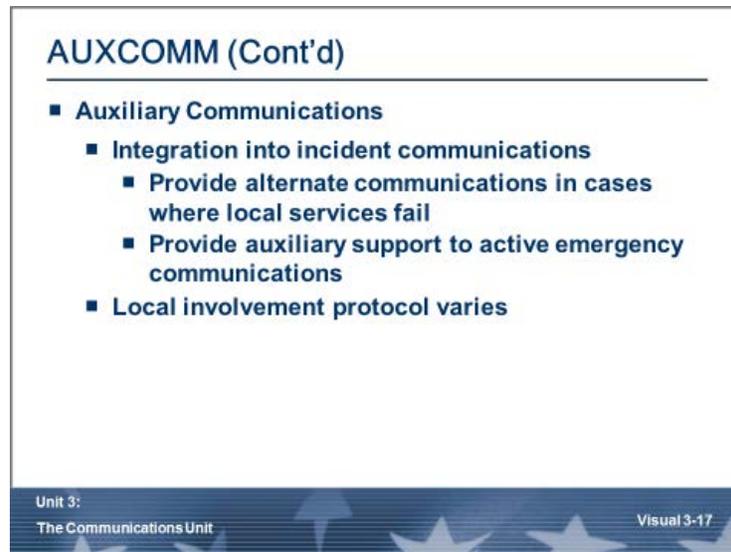
This unofficial ICS position supports the operational and technical aspects of the Auxiliary Communications Unit, maintains and/or operates the AUXCOMM network. The knowledge to perform this function applies to every AUXCOMM position.

Auxiliary Communicators have been helping with backup emergency communications since before the Titanic sank.

Every state uses AUXCOMM personnel in one way or the another. Some states more than other states.

The new NECP mentions the use of volunteer radio operators more than any edition prior.

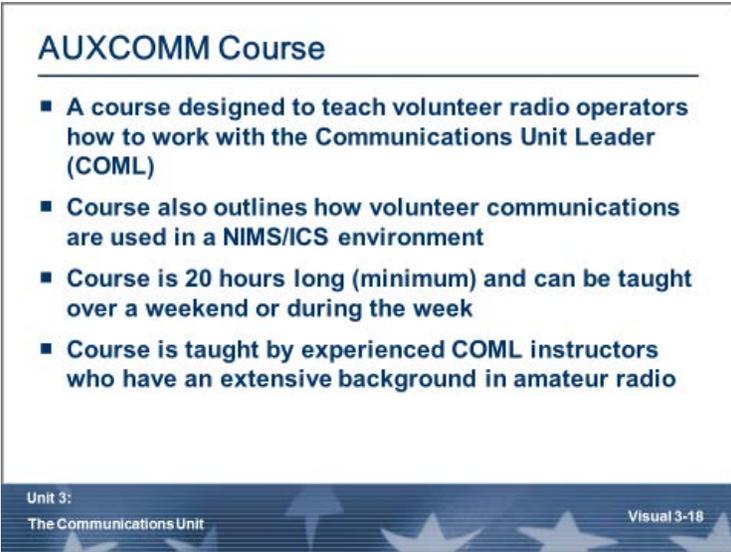
AUXCOMM personnel have been used in major events such as the Haiti hurricane, the lost plane from Malaysia, Katrina, Sandy, tornado outbreaks in Missouri and Oklahoma. Use personal examples if you have them.

Topic AUXCOMM (cont'd)**Explain the Following Key Points**

Discussion of the groups and use of amateur radio operators:

- ARES – Amateur Radio Emergency communications RACES – Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services
- MARS – Military Auxiliary Radio Service
- Needs to be coordinated by the COML as part of the overall communications strategy
- Integration into incident communications
 - Provide alternate communications in cases where local services fail
 - Provide auxiliary support to active emergency communications
- Local involvement protocol varies
- AUXCOMM classes are available through OEC

Topic AUXCOMM Course

A slide titled "AUXCOMM Course" with a blue header and footer. The main content is a list of four bullet points. The footer contains the text "Unit 3: The Communications Unit" on the left and "Visual 3-18" on the right.

AUXCOMM Course

- A course designed to teach volunteer radio operators how to work with the Communications Unit Leader (COML)
- Course also outlines how volunteer communications are used in a NIMS/ICS environment
- Course is 20 hours long (minimum) and can be taught over a weekend or during the week
- Course is taught by experienced COML instructors who have an extensive background in amateur radio

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Visual 3-18

Explain the Following Key Points

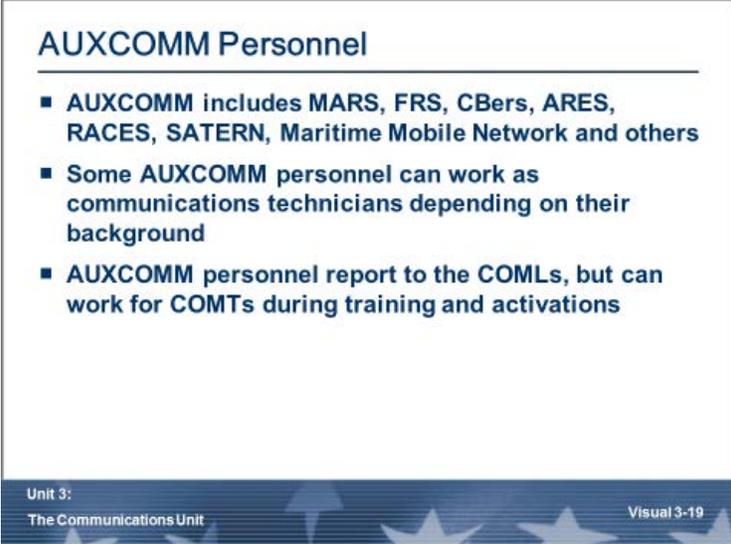
Introduce Auxiliary Communications Course.

The class is primarily geared to teach volunteer radio people about NIMS/ICS and what will be expected of them should they work in a NIMS/ICS environment.

This is a very long two day course. We do not shorten up the second day at all. It really is two 10hr days to correctly teach this course.

Last bullet: Notice the correct version of ICS 100b, 200b, 700a and 800b. People who only have 100, 200, etc. under their belts from 6+ years ago do not have the correct version for this course. Some people will say that FEMA has grandfathered them if they took the original 100, etc. course. People do forget this is not a FEMA course, but a course from OEC which has OEC requirements.

Topic AUXCOMM Personnel



AUXCOMM Personnel

- AUXCOMM includes MARS, FRS, CBers, ARES, RACES, SATERN, Maritime Mobile Network and others
- Some AUXCOMM personnel can work as communications technicians depending on their background
- AUXCOMM personnel report to the COMLs, but can work for COMTs during training and activations

Unit 3:
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Visual 3-19

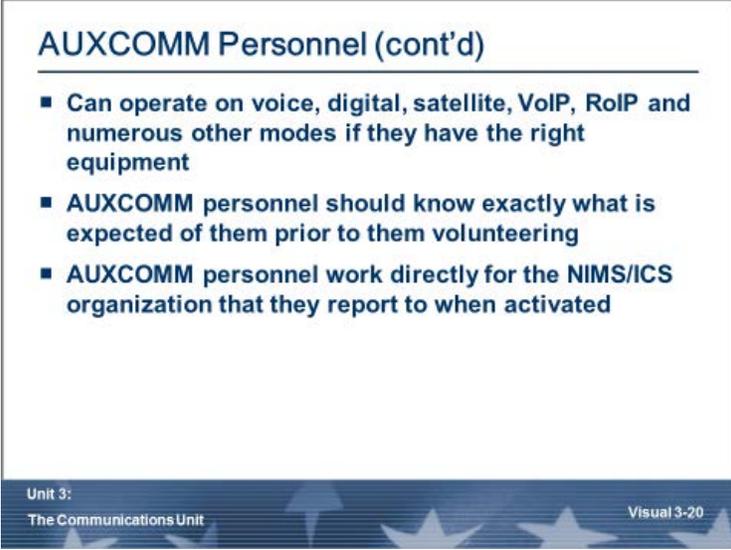
Explain the Following Key Points

Bottom Line: AUXCOMM people can work well in a NIMS/ICS environment if they are taught the rules and what specifically is required of them.

AUXCOMM people need to know they work for the COML and not their local radio club when activated.

Most importantly, they must train alongside the COML if there is to be a working bond between them during activation.

Topic AUXCOMM Personnel (cont'd)



AUXCOMM Personnel (cont'd)

- Can operate on voice, digital, satellite, VoIP, RoIP and numerous other modes if they have the right equipment
- AUXCOMM personnel should know exactly what is expected of them prior to them volunteering
- AUXCOMM personnel work directly for the NIMS/ICS organization that they report to when activated

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Visual 3-20

Explain the Following Key Points

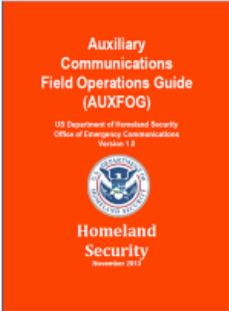
Bottom Line: AUXCOMM people can work well in a NIMS/ICS environment if they are taught the rules and what specifically is required of them.

AUXCOMM people need to know they work for the COML and not their local radio club when activated.

Most importantly, they must train alongside the COML if there is to be a working bond between them during activation.

AUXFOG

- The DHS Auxiliary Field Operations Guide (AUXFOG) was released by OEC in 2013.
- It can be downloaded from the OEC Public Safety Tools website at www.publicsafetytools.info



Unit 3:
The Communications Unit

Visual 3-21

Explain the Following Key Points

Introduce Auxiliary Field Operations Guide (AUXFOG).

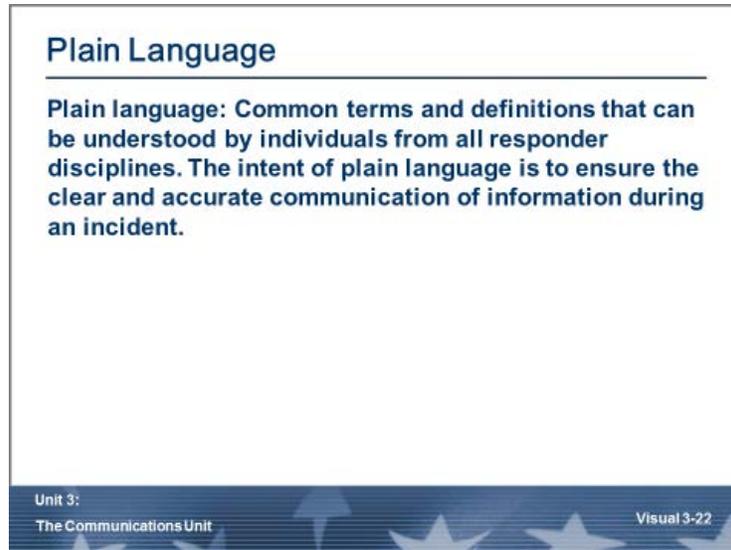
The FOG was authored specifically for AUXCOMM people, but COMLs and COMTs have been known to use this as well.

It can be downloaded so they can put it together in a handy 4"x7" document that will fit in field pants.

It can also be downloaded on a tablet for their use.

Hard copy is always preferable since tablets do run out of battery when they are activated for a major event.

Topic Plain Language



Explain the Following Key Points

Reinforce the importance of using plain language.

This was adopted to eliminate the plethora of different codes that have been adopted over the years by agencies.

Topic Common Terminology

Common Terminology

Common Terminology

- Is an ICS wide fundamental
- Necessary for operations, planning, and standard operating procedures (SOPs)
- A common dialect for describing the “who, what, when, where, why, and how” of operations
- Common terminology requires a standardized dictionary of terms and terminology

Unit 3:
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Visual 3-23

Explain the Following Key Points

Reinforce the importance of using common terminology.

Not all Plain Language has the same meaning, and the outcomes can be very different.

It is essential that all responders understand the mission the same way to be effective.

Topic Common Terminology (cont'd)

Common Terminology

ICS establishes common terminology that allows diverse incident management and support organizations to work together across a wide variety of incident management functions and hazard scenarios.



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Visual 3-24

Explain the Following Key Points

Identify what common terminology contributes to ICS.

Organizational Functions

Major functions and functional units with incident management responsibilities are named and defined. Terminology for the organizational elements is standard and consistent.

Resource Descriptions

Major resources—including personnel, facilities, and major equipment and supply items—that support incident management activities are given common names and are “typed” with respect to their capabilities, to help avoid confusion and to enhance interoperability.

Incident Facilities

Common terminology is used to designate the facilities in the vicinity of the incident area that will be used during the course of the incident.

Technology solutions by themselves are not sufficient to fully address communication interoperability problems in a given local government, state, or multi-state region. State and local officials consider a standard database of interoperable communications frequencies to be essential to frequency planning and coordination for interoperability frequencies and for general public safety purposes. Police and fire departments often have different concepts and doctrines on how to operate an incident command post and use interoperable communications. Similarly, first responders, such as police and fire departments, may use different terminology to describe the same thing. Differences in terminology and operating procedures can lead to communications problems even

where the participating public safety agencies share common communications equipment and spectrum. State and local officials have drawn specific attention to problems caused by the lack of common terminology in naming the same interoperability frequency (GAO 04-1057T pg. 9).

Topic Common Terminology (cont'd)

Common Terminology (cont'd)

Not all Common Terminology has the same meaning. For example, the term “cover” has several meanings.

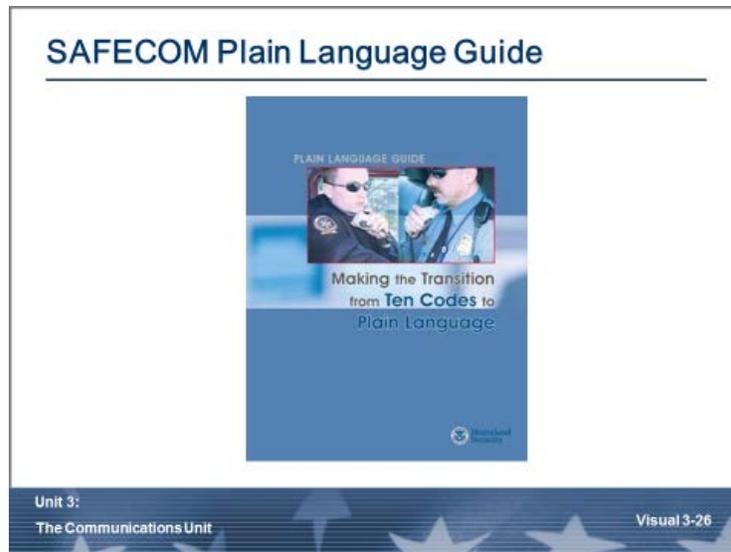
- If you told a fire fighter to cover they would take their fire engine and go to another station
- If you told a police officer to cover they would back up another officer
- If you told a Marine to cover they would lay down 50 cal. suppressive gun fire

Unit 3:
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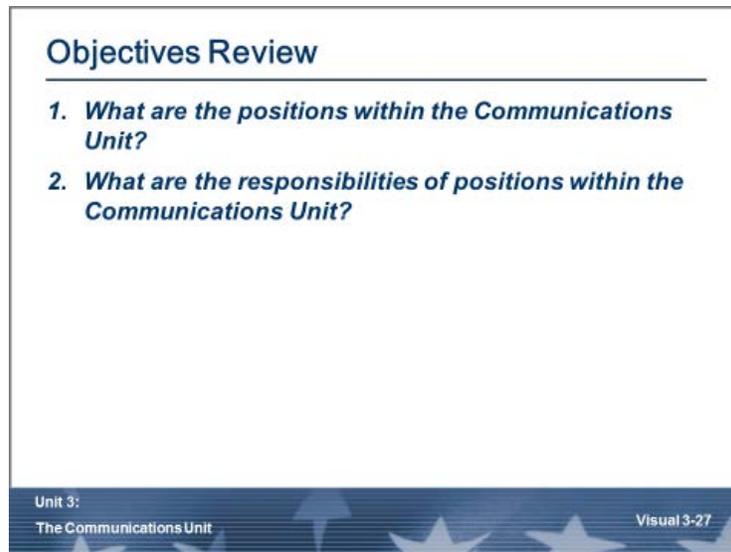
Visual 3-25

Explain the Following Key Points

Provide an example of uncommon terminology.

**Explain the Following Key Points**

Provide a future reference guide for the students. This guide is on the student CD.



Explain the Following Key Points

Review the Enabling Objectives for this unit to ensure that the class has obtained the knowledge necessary to successfully meet the Unit Terminal Objective.

Pose the Unit Enabling Objectives as questions. Ask the group to give a brief example/short explanation to answer each question. Try to call on a different student for each objective.

This is not intended to be an inclusive discussion of all material covered in Unit 3, but rather a quick and engaging way to wrap up the unit, and reconnect the students to the material before moving on to Unit 4.

Ask the students to write down the top three to five things they learned in this unit on their ICS Form 214.

Leave the Objectives Review slide up so that students can think about what they learned in relation to the objectives. At the end of the day, collect their ICS Form 214s. This will help identify what the students have learned and what areas may be especially important to highlight throughout the rest of the course. This activity should be done at the end of each unit.

Unit Terminal Objective:

At the end of this unit, students will be able to describe the function and components of the Communications Unit.

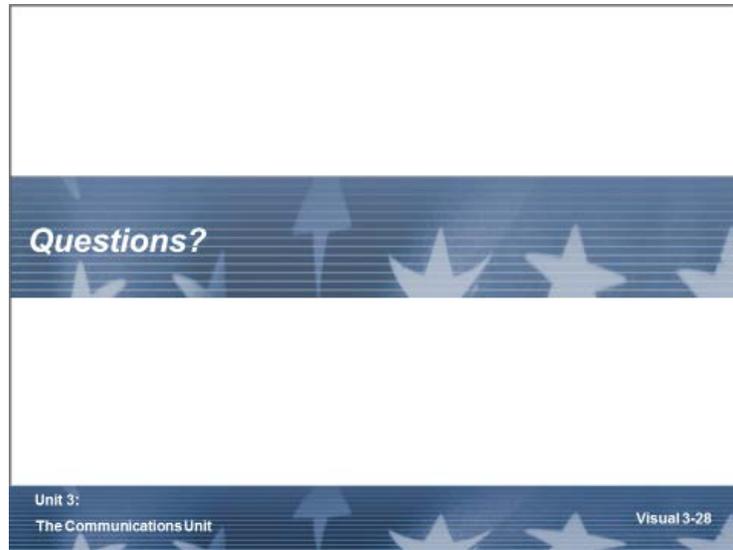
Unit Enabling Objectives

- Identify positions within the Communications Unit.
- Describe responsibilities of positions within the Communications Unit.

- Describe the qualification process for the COML.
- Identify components of the COML Response Kit.

Topic

Questions

**Explain the Following Key Points**

Provide students an opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification on presented material in this unit.