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# Unit 3: The Communications Unit

STUDENT GUIDE

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**Objectives**

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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**

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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**

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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.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Time</b>
Lesson	1 hour, 30 minutes
<b>Total Time</b>	<b>1 hour, 30 minutes</b>

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**Topic**

Unit Title Slide

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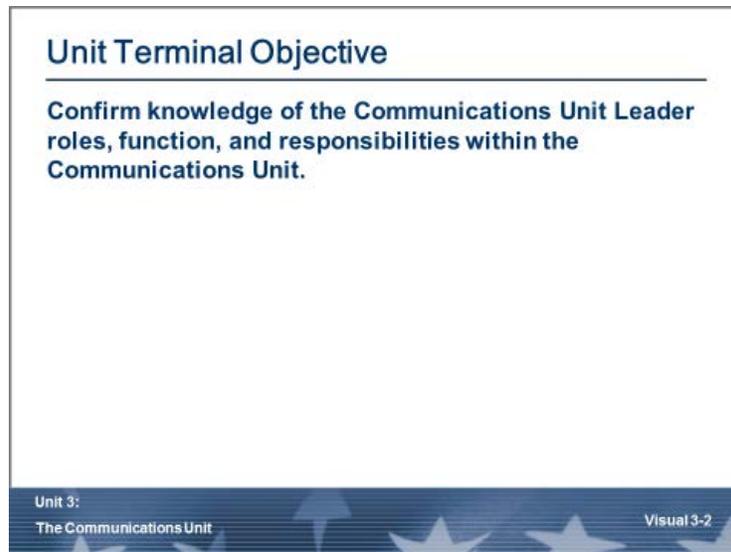


**Key Points**

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**Topic**Unit Terminal Objective

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**Key Points**

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**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

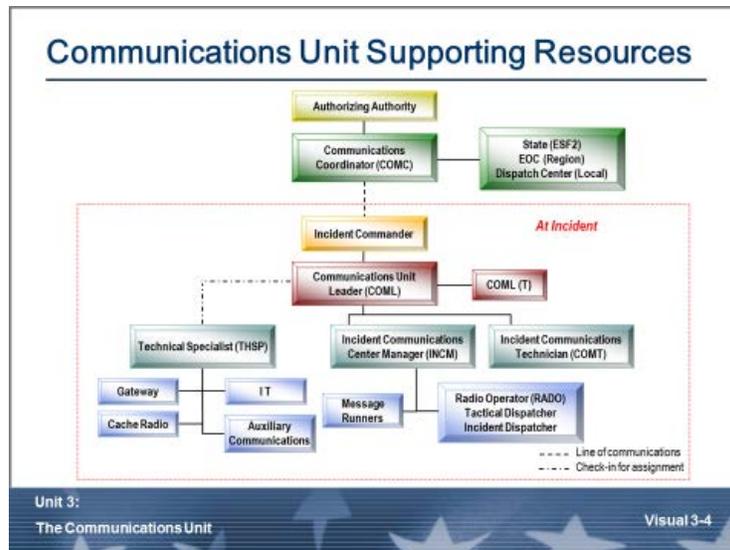
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Key Points

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## Topic Communications Unit Supporting Resources



### Key Points

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



**Key Points**

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**Topic** Communications Unit Personnel

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**Key Points**

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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 Communications (AUXCOMM)—This unofficial ICS position supports the operational and technical aspects of the AUXCOMM 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

**Topic** Communications Unit Leader

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**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



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Visual 3-7

**Key Points**

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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, 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.



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Visual 3-8

### Key Points

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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)

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**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)**



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Visual 3-9

**Key Points**

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**Topic**Incident Communications Technician (COMT)

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**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

**Key Points**

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**Topic** Incident Communications Technician (COMT)

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**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

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Visual 3-11

### Key Points

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The COMT is responsible for duties that include:

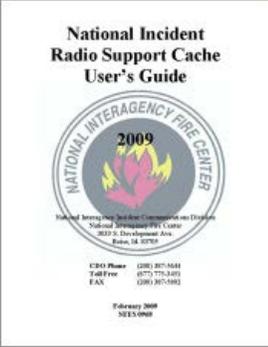
- Provides for equipment distribution
- Tracks equipment
- Trains users on use of equipment
- Verifies proper programming of equipment for incident
- Assists COML in the development of the ICS Form 205, Incident Radio Communications Plan

Topic Incident Communications Technician

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**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.



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Visual 3-12

## Key Points

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### RADO

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



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Visual 3-13

### Key Points

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## Topic

Incident Dispatchers and Tactical Dispatchers

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**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.



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Visual 3-14

**Key Points**

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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 the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC). 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

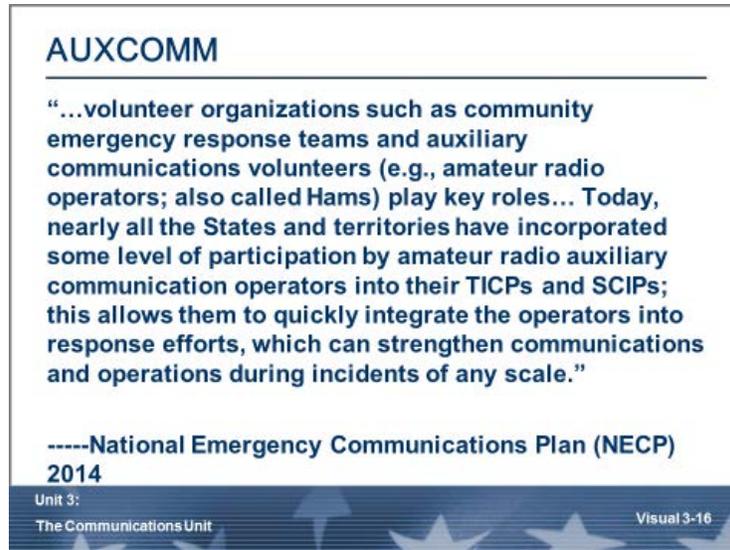


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Visual 3-15

**Key Points**

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

**Topic** Auxiliary Communications (AUXCOMM)**Key Points**

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)

**AUXCOMM (Cont'd)**

- **Auxiliary Communications**
  - **Integration into incident communications**
    - **Provide alternate communications in cases where local services fail**
    - **Provide auxiliary support to active emergency communications**
  - **Local involvement protocol varies**

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Visual 3-17

**Key Points**

- 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

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**AUXCOMM Course**

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- 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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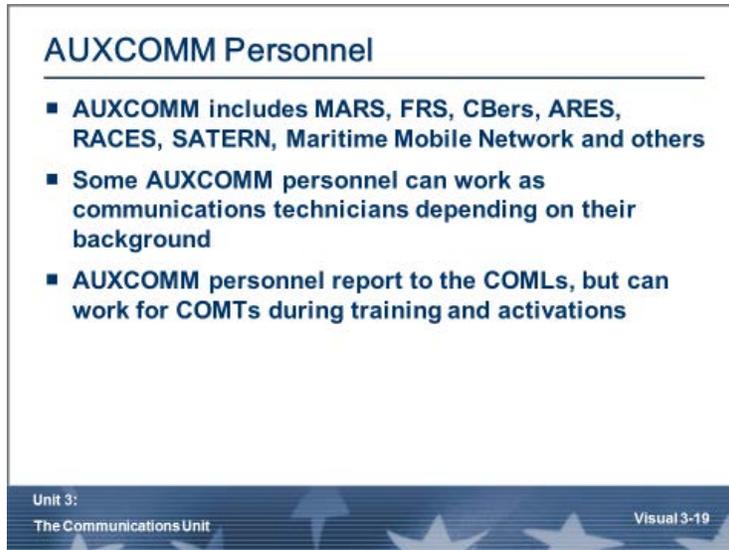
Visual 3-18

**Key Points**

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**Topic**AUXCOMM Personnel

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**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**

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Visual 3-19

**Key Points**

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**Topic** AUXCOMM Personnel (cont'd)

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**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

**Key Points**

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**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](http://www.publicsafetytools.info)



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Visual 3-21

### Key Points

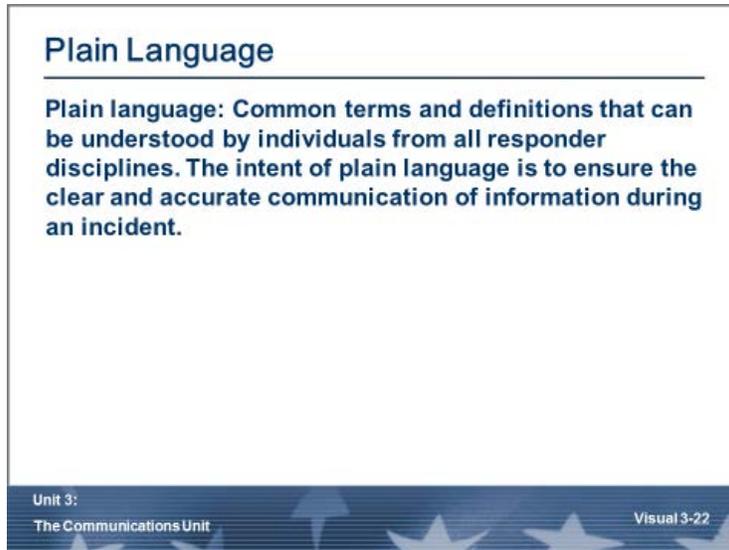
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#### Auxiliary Field Operations Guide (AUXFOG)

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

**Topic**Plain Language

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**Key Points**

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## Topic

Common Terminology

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**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

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Visual 3-23

**Key Points**

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**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.

A photograph showing a person in a dark suit and glasses looking at a tablet computer. The person is seated at a desk with papers and a laptop. The background is slightly blurred, showing an office or control room environment.

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Visual 3-24

**Key Points****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)

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**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

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Visual 3-25

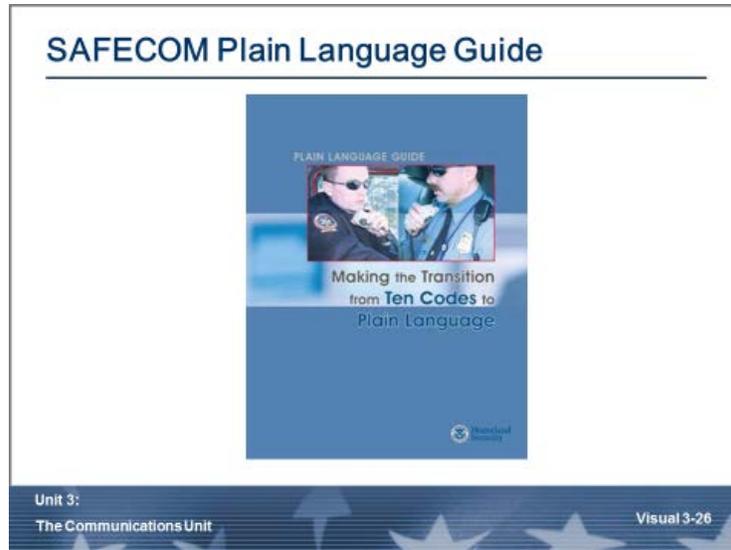
**Key Points**

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Topic

SAFECOM Plain Language Guide

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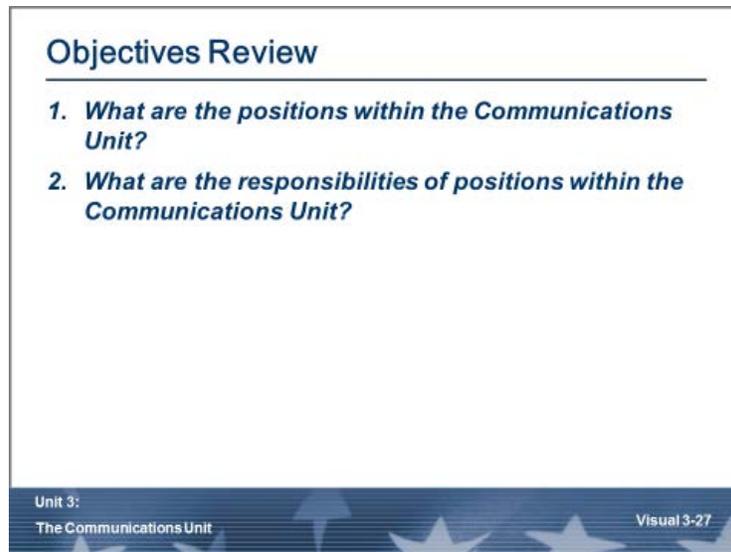


Key Points

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Topic Objectives Review

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### Key Points

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#### **Unit Terminal Objective**

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

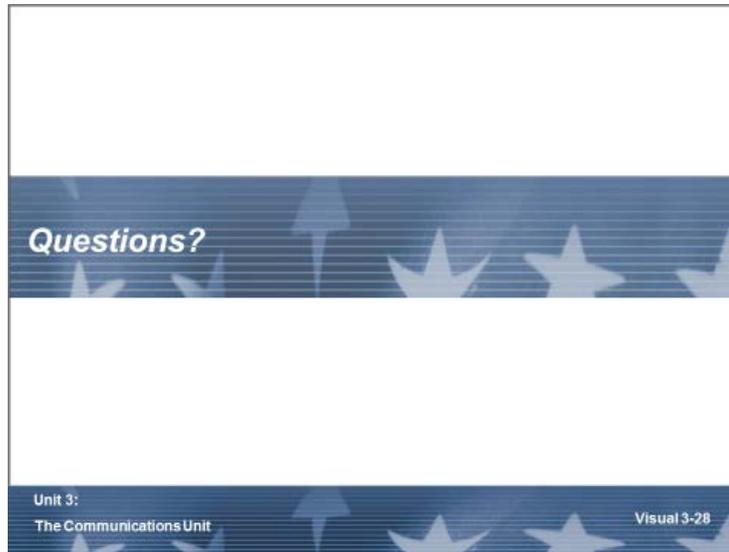
#### **Unit Enabling Objectives**

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

Topic

Questions

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Key Points

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