

REDCOM's Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q – Why doesn't REDCOM use a pre-alert notification prior to dispatching us out on a call?

A- Pre-alerts actually slow down the dispatch process. The CAD automatically "loads" all of the equipment selection for call type so that one dispatch transaction contains all of your equipment recommendations as well as any "mutual aid" resources (and departments) for the particular incident in question. A one button "push" by the dispatcher then sends out all of the information simultaneously. A pre-alert would have to be done manually and the Chief's Association elected to go with the "automatic" dispatch option. The above notwithstanding, a change in order of information is in the works (through the SOP revision process), so that the incident type (i.e., "Structure Fire" or Vegetation Fire" or "Medical Aid") will be announced at the beginning of the dispatch so that dispatched departments will know what PPE to wear or what specialized equipment or apparatus to respond with.

Q. - Why can't REDCOM just do a department alert/dispatch and let us decide what equipment to send, rather than listing all of the apparatus we're supposed to send?

A – The CAD system tracks and statuses all fire equipment in the county on a continuous basis. Based on our mutual aid system, not only is your equipment tracked for your responses, your equipment is also tracked for availability to respond to neighboring departments' incidents. As your apparatus is responding, the CAD automatically removes it from the "available resource" list for other departments. The Chief's Association decided to have all equipment listed up front rather than have the dispatcher have to list responding equipment on every call, which would be time consuming, cumbersome and possibly contribute to a dispatch delay in getting resources on the road.

Q – What if we don't want to send the CAD recommended resources to a particular incident?

A – No one is required to send the specific resource(s) that were recommended. When you go in service in response to the incident, advise your control dispatcher of the change in equipment response.

Q – On our last response / incident, the CAD listed our water tender instead of our squad for a medical aid. What's wrong with the CAD?

A – The CAD deployment tables listed equipment preference and order as they were submitted by each department for each ESZ (emergency service zone) within that department's jurisdictional area. The CAD is only as good at recommending resources as it was told to do by your department's representative who developed your deployment tables. There is also the possibility that a particular piece of apparatus (in this case the squad) is not listed as "available" by the CAD. It is very important to notify REDCOM when an apparatus that was taken out of service for maintenance as an example, is returned to "available" status. Also, if different types of equipment in the same beat (usually a fire station) have the required attribute(s) for a specific incident type, CAD will consider them equal and the tie may be broken randomly. There are attributes available where "tie breaking" is desirable.

Q – How do we go about changing equipment preference and response order for our department?

A – Using the same CAD codes for responses, you would submit a new response code for the particular event type for that ESZ. At this time, deployment changes should be submitted on an Excel spreadsheet via e-mail to Sophia Galifaro at County Fire Services (sgalifar@sonoma-county.org.) Remember, if your intent is to change recommended units and response order for a particular street within an ESZ, your new changes will affect the entire ESZ along with the street in question.

Q – We need to modify an ESZ or create a new one. How do we go about doing that?

A – You will need to contact Kevin Lacefield at GIS (CAD geographical information systems, 565-2109) and explain what you want to do. He will arrange a time convenient to both of you to come in and make the changes. At this time it is anticipated that new mapping changes for the CAD GIS file will be updated on a monthly basis, typically around the first week of the month. Your request will need to be submitted no later than the third week of the previous month in order to be effected at the monthly mapping modification. Remember, if you're modifying an ESZ jurisdictional boundary line, you need to be sure that the neighboring jurisdiction is aware of your proposed change. If you are adding or deleting an ESZ, you will need to modify your deployment plan accordingly

Q – We keep hearing loud audio tones / noise / echoes when REDCOM broadcasts. Why is that?

A – The REDCOM broadcast system is now being "simulcast" from multiple transmitter sites located throughout the county. The old system was "repeater voted", that is a transmitter site was selected for a particular area by the dispatcher. A field unit's radio transmission was picked up by the repeater site sensing the strongest signal from the field unit and then relayed it to the dispatch center. The dispatch center's signal was then relayed along the same repeater path. The new system does not vote, all transmitters broadcast simultaneously. Those echoes or audio distortion you hear mean that some of the repeater sites have to be realigned and recalibrated which means a technician has to visit the site in order to reset it. This will take a few months to do. However, the simulcast system will never provide a signal as crisp as the signal from a single transmitter. Simulcast does provide a major benefit to the users since paging now occurs county-wide and reduces the possibility of someone missing a page out because of not being in the coverage area of a specific transmitter site. Simulcast also eliminates having to re-page over different repeater sites, as was done in the past, in order to activate pagers in the more remote areas of the county.

Q – REDCOM doesn't seem to hear us on Control 2,3,4,5, etc. in our area. What can we do to get them to hear us better?

A - Notify REDCOM via the *Dispatch Comment Form* ("*forms*" section on this website). The REDCOM radio system uses different (control) frequencies for different areas. Some of these frequencies have limitations due to their FCC license requirements and cover some areas better than others. REDCOM is learning what control channels work best for which areas within each zone. Your feedback will help them (and you) make these adjustments and assignments accordingly. Be sure to list the area in question in addition to the incident address on the form. The form can be e-mailed (amrsonomadispach@amr-ems.com) or faxed to REDCOM (568-6693).

Q – Who decides what procedures we're to follow?

A – The Dispatch Operations Advisory Group (DOAG) is comprised of representatives from City Fire Departments, Districts, EMS, Dispatch and County Fire. The DOAG submits proposed procedures, or changes in procedures, to the REDCOM Board of Directors for approval and implementation. New procedures are not created in a vacuum; many Chiefs and/or department representatives attend the DOAG meeting, which is held monthly on the 4th Tuesday of the month, typically at SFRD Training Tower classroom, from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. If you would like to submit comments or suggestions, contact a DOAG member, your Zone Chief or attend the DOAG meetings, which are open to all members of the REDCOM JPA as well as the general public.

Q – We seem to be getting a ream of paper faxed to us after every incident. Some of the pages have only one line of print. What’s up with that?

A – The CAD was programmed to send a “clear” compatible report for every piece of equipment sent to a call. Unfortunately it was not formatted / sized for fax machines, which contain a different number of text lines than an email or Word document. Work is underway to compress the report (or change it entirely to another option – the chronological report, which will list all equipment and times etc.)

Q – We keep getting sent out on control burns, why is that?

A – REDCOM keeps a “Burn Log” of control burns that folks called in to the burn line. Most days several dozen burns are called in and the dispatchers have to get that information off of the voice mail and enter it in the CAD. There is an unavoidable delay in getting that information logged some days unfortunately. Also, the reporting parties don’t always live on the same street or neighborhood that the control burn is occurring at and the CAD doesn’t “recognize” the call / location as a control burn. In the SOP Manual, there is a directive for the dispatchers, which states, “When in doubt, send it out”. Departments can always elect to modify the assignment for a smoke investigation instead of responding a full wild land response.

Q – When we send in a “Dispatch Comment Form”, where does it go and what happens to it?

A – The form is given to the REDCOM Director, who reviews all comment forms. Either the director or one of the REDCOM dispatch supervisors will respond to your comment. If the dispatch staff can’t solve the issue raised by you quickly, your comment form may be forwarded on to the DOAG for action.

Q – Where are all of these procedures and rules found?

A- All procedures are contained within the REDCOM SOP Manual. A copy can be downloaded from this website.