



**Iowa Statewide Interoperable Communications System (ISICS)
Standards, Protocols, Procedures**

ISICS Standard: Statewide Interoperable Plain Language Usage	Standard #:	1.3.0
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	Version:	2.0

1. Purpose or Objective

Plain Language (clear speech) Compatibility:

The use of plain language (clear speech) in emergency management and incident response is a matter of public safety, especially the safety of emergency response personnel and those affected by an incident. It is critical that those involved with an incident know and utilize commonly established operational structures, terminology, policies, and procedures. This will facilitate the achievement of interoperability across agencies/organizations, jurisdictions, and disciplines, and align with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS).

2. Technical Background

• **Capabilities**

Integrated Communications:

Incident communications are facilitated through the development and use of a common communications plan and interoperable communications processes and architectures. The ICS 205 Form is available to assist in developing a common communications plan. This integrated approach links operational and support units of agencies involved and is necessary to maintain communications and enable common situational awareness / interaction. Preparedness planning should address the equipment, systems, and protocols necessary to achieve integrated voice and data incident management communications.

• **Constraints**

To create brevity and standardization of messaging, code systems have been in place in public safety for decades. Though standardized locally, there are no national or state standardized code systems and therefore interoperable communication suffers. Utilizing plain language for interoperable communication needs only and maintaining an operational code system creates confusion for those who are unable to move out of operational modes of communication they are accustomed to. The use of plain language for all communications is encouraged.

3. Operational Context

Any communications between organizational elements during an incident should be in plain language to ensure that information dissemination is timely, clear, acknowledged, and understood by all intended recipients. Codes should not be used, and all communications should be confined to essential messages. The use of acronyms should be avoided during incidents requiring the participation of multiple agencies or organizations. Policies and procedures that foster compatibility should be defined to allow information sharing among all emergency response personnel and their affiliated organizations to the greatest extent possible.

Encryption or Tactical Language:

When necessary, emergency response personnel and their affiliated organizations need to have a methodology and systems in place to encrypt information so that security can be maintained. Although plain language may be appropriate during response to most incidents, tactical language is occasionally warranted due to the nature of the incident (e.g., high-risk incident, such as active shooter.) The use of specialized encryption and tactical language should be incorporated into any comprehensive incident action plan (IAP) or incident management communications plan (IMCP).

4. Standardized Policy

It is required that plain language be used for multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional, and multi-discipline events, such as major disasters and exercises. Beginning in the fiscal year that starts on Oct. 1, 2006, federal preparedness grant funding is contingent on the use of plain language in incidents requiring assistance from responders from other agencies, jurisdictions, and functional disciplines.

Primary Intended Use:

Multi-agency or multi-jurisdictional emergency response or exercise.

Best Practices Encouraged:

It is critical that all responders, including those from other jurisdictions or states, as well as the federal government, know and utilize common operational structures, terminology, policies, and procedures.

Incident Scope and Geographic Area:

Regional and statewide interoperability talkgroups are available for use everywhere the ISICS platform provides geographic coverage, regardless of incident size or scale.

Interoperability incidents may be localized or dispersed in area. Participating personnel and resources may be local, regional, statewide, or national. Incidents may be pre-planned or emergent in nature.

5. Standardized Procedure

While the NIMS Integration Center does not require plain language for internal operations, it is strongly encouraged. It is important to practice everyday terminology and procedures that will be used during emergency incidents and disasters. NIMS implementation is a long-term effort. Though it is not practical to expect a change of ingrained habits overnight, it is expected that over time, everyone will understand the importance of using plain language for day-to-day operations.

Unit Identification:

When operating on the regional and statewide interoperability talkgroups, users should initially identify in the following manner using plain language: Agency being contacted, personnel agency name and service branch or function designation, followed by call sign or unit number and talkgroup.

Examples:

“Cedar Rapids State Radio, from North EMS 512 on R1 CALL11”,

“Dallas County, from Elk River Police 512 on IA CALL1,”

“Johnson County, from Washington County Public Works 512 on R6 CALL1,”

“ISP 512, from 63-4 on R5 CALL51,” etc.

Once established, ongoing communications between the same units may be shortened.

Use of 10-Codes and Acronyms:

The use of 10-codes, signals, unique acronyms, and any other codes should not be used on the regional and statewide interoperability talkgroups because there is no standardized set of codes. Plain language should be used in all cases.

6. Management

N/A