



SPECIAL EVENTS UNIFIED COMMAND, COMMUNICATIONS AND INTEROPERABILITY CHECKLIST

Major events do not fail because agencies lack radios or a command chart on paper. They fail when the right people are not in the room, roles are unclear, communications plans are too complicated to use under stress, or agencies discover too late that they are not operating from the same picture. This checklist is intended to help fire service leaders and partner agencies establish a usable command structure, confirm how information will move, and ensure communications systems work across the event footprint before operations begin.

Months Prior

- Identify all agencies and disciplines that must be represented in unified command.
- Define command roles, support roles, and primary and alternate points of contact.
- Establish who has authority for operational decisions, route control, protective actions, and resource requests.
- Determine what radio, dispatch, and data-sharing systems will be used across agencies.
- Identify interoperability gaps early, including terminology, coverage, and notification pathways.
- Establish one common operating picture and one master contact roster.

Weeks Prior

- Confirm unified command participants, alternates, and reporting relationships.
- Finalize radio plans, talk groups, channel assignments, and backup communications methods.
- Ensure dispatch centers understand the event command structure and notification expectations.
- Confirm how agencies will share route changes, hospital status, weather impacts, threat information, and operational updates.
- Identify weak coverage areas and plan around them.
- Confirm who will maintain maps, contact rosters, and COP updates.



Operational Period

- Confirm who is present in unified command and who is serving as alternate if needed.
- Review command assignments, contact rosters, radio plans, and backup communications methods.
- Verify that all agencies are operating from the same maps, route plans, and reference points.
- Share updates to routes, staging, hospital status, crowd conditions, weather, and emerging hazards.
- Correct communications issues from the previous operational period before the event opens.

During an Incident

- Activate the agreed command structure early and make role assignments clear.
- Use plain language across agencies when conditions change quickly.
- Ensure critical updates move to all affected partners, not just within one discipline.
- Shift to backup communications methods early if primary systems begin to degrade.
- Maintain one common operating picture so agencies are not acting on competing information.

Recovery

- Confirm command transition and demobilization responsibilities before releasing resources.
- Capture communications failures, workarounds, and interoperability gaps while they are still fresh.
- Update radio plans, contact rosters, and notification procedures based on what was learned.