

COMPANY OFFICERS ACADEMY COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY FAQ's

Q – What does a mobile status terminal (MST) do?

A – It changes your unit's status (ER, OS, AOS, AVL, AIQ), moves your unit (MOVX, FSXX), sends a message to the dispatcher (ACK), or makes a CAD inquiry (COVP).

Q – The MST on my apparatus has buttons that let me move myself into several other districts so I don't have to talk on the radio. Do all agencies have this?

A – No. However all MST's have a button that allows the Captain to show the apparatus back in the home district.

Q – When I have been assigned a move up where does CAD see my apparatus?

A – As soon as you have been moved CAD sees your apparatus as being in the destination district. You must however, place your apparatus enroute to the move up.

Q – What MST button do I use to acknowledge a move up?

A – Use AOR or AVL (depending on the labeling) from the MST.

Q – Can I use the “acknowledge” button on the Zetron in the apparatus bay to acknowledge a move up?

A – No. The acknowledge command only applies to incidents that have been dispatched. Move ups are not an actual incident (with run numbers, incident numbers, etc), therefore only the AOR/AVL button on the MST will show your company enroute to a move up.

Q - If I've been moved up to another district and I push AVL does it show me back in my home district ?

A - No, it shows you enroute to the district sent. (See question above)

Q – I placed my company out of service with the MST then went available verbally. Why does the MST still show me out of service?

A – The MST reflects the last status update you SENT to the center by MST. MST's do not receive status updates from CAD.

Q – I was out of service in training three Cities away from my own. Do I advise radio of each district I am passing through on the way back?

A – No. Stay out of service until you want to be shown available for your district then go back in service. Listen to the radio in your current zone and if you are in position for an assignment you may answer up.

Q – I was out of service in training three cities away from my own. How should I report that I am back in service in my district?

A – Push AOR (AVL) then MOVX on the MST.

Q – What is the MOVX button?

A – MOVX moves your apparatus to its home district. It is typically used when you have moved yourself to another district for a detail and are returning home.

Q – Can I use MOVX to return from a move up?

A – No. When a move up is canceled your apparatus is shown in its home quarters immediately. In fact, the dispatcher actually types the MOVX when they return your apparatus.

Q – I just cleared a full assignment two districts away from my own. Do I advise radio of each district I am passing through on the way back?

A – No.

Q – I just picked up my paramedic at the hospital and am heading back to district. What should I do to report that I am back in service?

A – Push AOR (AVL) when back in district. Going to the hospital simply changes the location of the incident you are already on. In this instance, you are just closing the call after leaving the hospital instead of when you leave the scene.

Q – I was assigned a move up then got a call. When I clear the call what should I do?

A – Ask the dispatcher where he would like you (CAD will keep you in the move up district even after you clear the incident).

Q – When I am ready to go back in service should I push AOR (AVL) or tell the dispatcher

A – If you are verbalizing your status to notify another company that's fine. If you are doing it out of habit try using the MST.

Q – Why do I have to tell radio to attach my unit to an incident that I wasn't dispatched to instead of just pushing enroute?

A – Your apparatus must be attached to an incident for the MST to apply its incident tracking functions.

Q – Can I use the AIQ button when I arrive at the station I have been moved up to?

A – NO! AIQ will return you to your HOME quarters. If you choose to report that you are in quarters please verbalize this over the radio.

Q – Why can't I push AIQ from the Zetron panel in the station I have been moved up to?

A – Because all buttons on the Zetron panel belong to the apparatus that live in that station. Pressing AIQ will remove the apparatus you are covering in for off their incident and make them available for another call.

Q – Can the dispatcher tell where the unit status change came from?

A – Yes. We can tell if the apparatus status change was generated from your MST or your station Zetron and at what time.

Q – What happens if I have been moved into another district then press that specific districts button on my MST when I arrive?

A – Nothing really. The dispatcher gets a message that says you are already in the district assigned. Remember, when move ups or returns are processed, your apparatus is shown in that district immediately.

Q – When I am on a move up should I notify the Center when I am in the target district?

A – No. CAD has had you there since the move up occurred.

Q – If my move up takes me across a zone boundary when do I switch channels?

A – as soon as you get in the apparatus.

Q – I didn't get an acknowledgement on my MST so I told the dispatcher I was on scene. They said that the MST shows me there. How come my MST didn't update?

A – MST's send the update then wait for a return verification from CAD. It is possible that the status being sent was received at the County but the outbound message from CAD was not received or processed by your MST.

Q – If I accidentally press a button that removes my apparatus from the incident while enroute should I tell the dispatcher?

A – Yes. This is especially critical on multi apparatus assignments where the dispatcher may not immediately notice your unit missing. If you don't say anything your unit will be available for another call. It may also affect the number of apparatus that are dispatched if the incident becomes a greater alarm.

Q – What is the difference between the ACK button on my MST and the ACK button on the Zetron?

A – The ACK button on the Zetron changes your unit status from unacknowledged to acknowledged. This is a critical time stamp and is considered a handshake between the comm center and the station. This lets the dispatcher know you heard the call. The ACK button on the MST simply sends a text message to the dispatcher that says "Engine (XX) acknowledges message". Use this if you don't feel like saying "10-4, copy or message received" to the dispatcher. Do not use this button to acknowledge move ups. Use the AVL (AOR) button.

Q – Should I tell the dispatcher if I go out of service or just push the button?

A – Either way. But the dispatcher will always need to know why and for how long you will be out of service, so voice contact will be needed at some point.

Q – Is there any correlation between my pager code and the MST ID code?

A – No. If you aren't getting pages its not an MST issue.

Q – What information do you need when I change apparatus?

A – The MST ID of the vehicle you are switching to and the pager ID of the pager that is connected to the printer in the new vehicle (assuming you don't take the printer pager from the vehicle you are leaving).

Q – What is COVP and how does it work

A – COVP (cover page) is a CAD inquiry which returns to the pagers attached to the apparatus that generated the request a list of all apparatus and working incidents in your department's jurisdiction. It is done by requesting a CAD inquiry and returning the information to the pagers attached to the apparatus that generated the request.

Q – Why don't I see a couple of the units from my department when I push COVP?

If one of your apparatus is in another city for any reason they won't show up on your COVP inquiry because it is in a different jurisdiction.

Q – Since we all have MST's why do Captains come up on the air and say they are enroute or clear the scene.

A – They shouldn't unless the MST is broken.

Q – Why is the cover in engine in my station when I returned from the call?

A – This should not happen, however there are some reasons why it may:

- Your travel time back to the station was short and the dispatcher was busy.
- There were other apparatus still attached to the incident so the dispatcher didn't get a message to close the call (which prompts the return of move ups). This typically occurs when clearing a fire. When you switch back to the primary from the tactical channel you may want to tell the dispatcher that you are back on the channel and returning along with activating the MST.

Q – Why do the dispatchers ask if I copied the call?

A – By policy you have 90 seconds to acknowledge or go enroute to the call. This can be done either by pushing the ACK button on the Zetron panel or by pushing the ENROUTE button on the MST. If the dispatcher hasn't received an acknowledgement from you they will call you once. If there is no response they will send the next due apparatus, place you out of service and notify the Battalion Chief. This is for your safety as well as the public's.

Q – If I am not able to get to the apparatus within 90 seconds to push the ENROUTE button can I advise verbally?

A – Yes, however the Dispatcher will only place your apparatus in ACKNOWLEDGED status. You are always responsible for placing your apparatus enroute to an incident. Verbal acknowledgements should only be used when you are unable to go enroute to an incident within 90 seconds (a FCA policy).

Q – What verbiage should I use when I need to advise that I copied a call?

A – "Engine (truck) ____ copies." There is no need to say "responding" since you indicate that status change by pressing ENROUTE.

Q – Why do the dispatchers ask if I can be available on scene?

A – If you have been on scene for a while the dispatcher may ask to avoid moving up another company for coverage.

Q – Why are move ups made on some calls and not others?

A – There are two scenarios that allow for the delay of move ups:

- A full assignment that has the low likelihood of committing all apparatus.
- A multi apparatus traffic accident that has the low likelihood of committing all apparatus.

Delay of a move up is not based on the type of incident (fire alarm, gas main break, etc.). They are based first on a response configuration, then on the likelihood of committing all apparatus.

These rules are eliminated if a neighboring group of stations is vacant or the zone is in depletion. Application of these rules may appear inconsistent from the field because the system is so dynamic.

Q – What criteria is used for selecting a move up apparatus

A - Geography, station reliability and location of current calls.

Q – Why do we move every time a call comes in for our neighboring station?

A – There are only three (really two) districts in the county which require a move up on a single engine response (this is due to geography). This perception is primarily because jurisdictions take companies out of service for training or other needs. The two or three companies in training may not have created a move up condition, but the single engine response now pushes the system into depletion.

Q – When responding to a move up am I supposed to go to the station or the district?

A – The station. All time models that the clusters were built from are based on response time from the stations.

Q – I can cover my district from the station I am going to for fuel. Do I have to tell the dispatcher?

A – Yes. If another station is out, you are not only responsible for your district but at least half of theirs. If you are not in your district there is a good chance you can't maintain response compliance to the district on the other side. Remember: when you are moved up you aren't just covering the district you were moved to, you are covering half of the district on the far side of it. When you move up to another station your response area increases and has an effect at least three stations deep. If you don't report your move you may not be included in a full assignment.

Q – Is my district and my 1st due response area the same?

A – Only when every one around you is in quarters. Your response area changes continuously based on other apparatus' location, availability and current call volume. Because the system is so dynamic it may be difficult from the field to get a clear picture of your response area at any given time.

Q – Why did you make the station ordering wrong in the City next to mine?

A – Station ordering is the responsibility of the jurisdiction.

Q – Are we ever going to use AVL (automatic vehicle locators)/GPS instead of station ordering?

A – The CAD system can do this, however each apparatus needs a GPS transmitter and a new computer geo-file would need to be purchased. In addition, all jurisdictions must switch to GPS recommendations at the same time.

Q – Why do dispatchers come to fires?

A – To allow the I/C to focus his/her efforts on the tactical channel and fire ground operation.

Q – What is the primary duty of the dispatcher at the command post?

A – Sitstat and Restat along with routine command channel radio traffic (to the comm center). The dispatcher does not make tactical decisions or communicate on the tactical channels.

Q – A Battalion Chief responds to the comm center on a third alarm. Why do dispatchers come to the incident on a second?

A – If we waited for the incident to go to a third alarm our response time would often leave us playing “catch up” through the entire event.

Q – What do the tones do that go over the radio before the dispatch?

A – The short tones (central and north) open a radio receiver in the police dispatch center. This allows the center to hear the fire dispatch and be aware a call is occurring in their city (they also receive a computer message similar to the station print out). The longer tones (typically on control 1) activate Minitor pagers that are carried by the BC's so they can hear calls that are specifically for them or for the entire district.

Q – Why do some agencies in the North stay on the primary channel during a full assignment?

A – We have been told that due to geography and simplex (nonrepeated) tactical channels certain companies can't hear the I/C when they are enroute. Therefore they stay on the primary until they arrive. All companies should conduct operations on the tac channel once on scene.

Q – Should we advise our location if we believe we are closer?

A – Advise your location and which company (or position due i.e.; 3rd due) you want to replace.

Q – What is the most appropriate way to special call an apparatus?

A – Request the QUANTITY and TYPE of apparatus needed (“Control 21 special call 1 truck to my location to assist with a flooding condition”), not a specific apparatus identification number. The CAD system will then find the closest type of apparatus you request.

Q – Does PSC have a list of available resources such as technical specialist, trench rescue, heavy equipment, etc.

A – No. However, as part of the RIC implementation, the CAD system will soon have the ability to make unit recommendations based on specific equipment carried or by personnel logged on. We do this today for ALS vs BLS engines and trucks.

Q – Will mobile data terminals be installed in apparatus?

A – Most BC’s and some agencies Engines and Trucks have mobile CAD terminals which allow them to view the dispatch status monitor, page, message the dispatcher, view incidents, etc. The purchase of vehicle computers is up to your individual department.

Q – Why does CAD take so long to download to Sunpro?

A – CAD wont download incident information until the call has been closed. A call may be left open because it had an exception and needs routing, or because a unit is still attached (fire inspector, other apparatus, etc). PSC’s systems supervisor gets paged automatically if the County’s side of Sunpro is down.