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continuously  
enhance public  
safety  
communications  
through  
leadership,  
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and service.



## **Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International**

### ***Plain Speech in Public Safety Communications***

Plain speech for public safety communications operations has been a matter of considerable discussion within the first responder community for several years. With the requirement to implement the National Incident Management System (NIMS), an effort by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to better coordinate emergency response between different jurisdictions and disciplines, APCO International has considered this issue in the context of sharing information by first responders.

Due to a number of important factors, APCO International renews its assertion that plain speech communications over public safety radio systems is preferred over the traditional 10-Codes and dispatch signals used by a majority of law enforcement agencies across the country. It is recognized that valid concerns about officer safety or confidential information being jeopardized should be resolved between the local agency(s) and the serving public safety communications center.

The impact of plain speech communications upon the public safety communications center allows the dispatcher and the field responder to use common language descriptors to indicate the nature of the event, situation, and person(s) that is the topic of the radio transaction. The abandonment of agency specific 10-Codes and dispatch signals support the incident command concepts to effectively coordinate response activity not only in multi-agency disaster situations but in routine intra-agency operations. APCO International asserts that the routine practice of effective radio protocol and discipline is the best form of disaster preparation.

APCO International recognizes that the lack of consistent, reliable communication services and/or poor performance are often cited in after action reports as a major failure during disaster situations. The fundamental principles of prompt, effective, competent communication will be dramatically improved, particularly when resources are deployed that originate from outside the primary response area, with implementation of plain speech procedures by all public safety

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## *Issue Paper: Plain Speech in Public Safety Communications*

agencies.

APCO International agrees with the NIMS Integration Center that the use of plain speech in emergency response situations is a matter of public safety, especially the safety of first responders and those affected by the incident. To best assure the use of this common, universal language during a major event, its daily use is required.

The entire Incident Command System (ICS), an effort of NIMS to provide a common organizational structure for the immediate response to emergencies involving the coordination of personnel and equipment on-site at an incident, requires resources being managed and functioning under a planned, approach that diminishes the risk created by unclear, unfamiliar or misunderstood codes and signals. Using plain speech is a simple remedy to reduce communication failures. This common approach is essential to achieving functional interoperability across all jurisdictions and disciplines.

APCO International encourages the use of sensible plain speech alternatives for common 10-Codes. For example:

- 10-4 – copy or acknowledge or understood
- 10-20 – my location is
- 10-28 – registration check – reg. check

APCO International believes that officer safety will be enhanced through thoughtful development of plain speech alternatives to codes/signals that protect the sensitivity of confidential information.

APCO International strongly supports the autonomy of local, county, state and other law enforcement agencies to make operational decisions. However, NIMS compliance is important and this fundamental communication procedure will have a dramatic affect on interoperability across the nation. APCO International supports the goal of NIMS of good faith efforts at all levels nationwide to move to plain speech for all emergency operations.

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