

# **Mutual Aid Box Alarm System Division #32**

## **ADVOCACY STATEMENT #1** **Box Alarm System Operation** 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

### **1.0 PURPOSE**

The purpose of the statement is to outline the procedures for the operation of fire service box alarm systems within MABAS Division #32.

### **2.0 SCOPE**

This recommendation applies to all members of MABAS Division #32 except the St. Louis Fire Department. The fire departments, dispatch agencies, and related emergency response organizations of the Division except the members based in the state of Missouri are encouraged to adopt the procedures set forth herein.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND**

The lack of a preplanned and structured mutual aid system frequently causes many confusing and dangerous situations. Typically an incident commander has very little time to devote to making a mutual aid call and neglects to give all of the information needed to initiate an adequate response. Assisting companies are simply dispatched to “a call for mutual aid” and given an address. Responding fire fighters do not know if they should take an engine, a tanker, a rescue squad, or a brush truck. Many times they are not even told what type of incident they are going to. To accommodate automatic mutual aid calls dispatch facilities simply have the county ETSBs add additional fire departments to the fire service response data in the 9-1-1 telephone system. This prompts the telecommunicators to dispatch more than one department to a structure fire as long as the call comes in on a 9-1-1 line but there is no information available regarding the specific apparatus or equipment needed. The telecommunicators do not get any information regarding automatic aid from seven-digit calls and all supervised fire alarm activations are reported over such lines. Additionally, using the 9-1-1 system for a dispatching tool is commonly known to be an inappropriate use of the system. These problems can all be solved with the adoption of a box alarm system which is truly the foundation of MABAS.

## 4.0 DEFINITIONS

**4.1 Box Alarm System-** a fire service dispatch system utilizing planned and sequential response of resources to emergency incidents.

**4.2 Zone-** A subdivision of a fire protection jurisdiction. Zones are created to allow change of resource response from one geographical area of a jurisdiction to another.

**4.3 Box Card-** the actual list of resource assignments. Fire department apparatus and vehicles are listed by number. Box cards are developed for a variety of situations within each zone. Cards for structure fire, rescue, and brush fire assignments are recommended for each zone.

**4.4 Still Alarm-** The resource assignment given to a “non-working” incident.

**4.5 First Alarm (Box) Assignment-** an assignment given to a reported “working” incident. This assignment shall, in many cases, be dispatched at the discretion of the tele-communicator.

**4.6 Greater Alarms-** the second through fifth sequential assignments of resources. The Incident Commander orders each subsequent alarm after the first alarm.

**4.7 Fill-In Company-** A fire company that is dispatched on an assignment to cover for a company that is out of service.

**4.8 Move-Up Company (Change in Quarters) -** A fire company that is moved to another fire station to provide coverage.

## 5.0 RECOMMENDED POLICY/PROCEDURE

### 5.1 Assignment of Box Card Numbers

- The first number is the number ID of the fire service jurisdiction as assigned by the MABAS Division. (Freeburg = 27)
- The second number is the zone number within the jurisdiction. The number of zones within a jurisdiction shall be unlimited.
- The third number is the box card within the zone. Cards shall be numbered as follows:
  - Structure Fire (Default Assignment)
  - Rescue
  - Brush Fire
- Examples:
  - 27-01-02= Freeburg FPD, Zone #1, Rescue Assignment
  - 40-05-01= New Athens FPD, Zone #5, Structure Fire Assignment

### 5.2 Incident Classification-Structure Fire

A still alarm on a structure fire card is any call except a structure fire, brush fire or rescue call. Still alarms normally do not require automatic mutual aid.

Some examples of still alarms on a fire incident card:

- Vehicle fire no exposures
- Trash or dumpster fire no exposures
- Odor of gas in residence
- Smoke or gas in the area
- Power line down / transformer
- Flush / wash down
- Bomb threat

A first alarm assignment on a structure fire card is any call that involves a fire in a building or a fire that is threatening a building. Many times a first alarm assignment requires dispatching automatic mutual aid.

Some examples of first alarms on a fire incident card:

- A fire in a building
- Fires outside of a structure where the structure is an exposure
- Automatic fire alarms
- Odors of smoke or something burning in a structure
- A vehicle fire in a garage

### **5.3 Incident Classification- Rescue**

A still alarm for a rescue incident is any call for a rescue that human life is not in danger.

Some examples of still alarms on a rescue card:

- Carbon monoxide alarm (without symptoms)
- Animal rescue
- Remove water from a building
- Assist the police dept (lights, ladder, search party (etc)
- Motor vehicle accident wash down

A 1<sup>st</sup> alarm assignment on a rescue card is any incident where a human is injured and/or trapped.

### **5.4 Incident Classification- Brush Fire**

A still alarm on a brush fire card is a reported small brush, field or grass fire with no nearby exposures.

Some examples of still alarms on a brush fire card:

- A small fire that is not spreading, i.e. campfire, etc.
- Very small grass, brush fire, or rubbish fire

A 1<sup>st</sup> alarm on a brush fire card is a spreading brush or wood fire that involves exposures other than.

Some examples of first alarms on a brush fire card:

- Field fire
- Woods fire
- Brush along a roadside

### **5.5 Dispatch Procedures**

Upon receipt of a call requiring fire department response the telecommunicator shall basically follow these steps:

- Classify the call as a structure fire, rescue, brush fire, etc.
- Determine the correct address, fire department jurisdiction, and zone number to obtain the correct box card.
- Determine if the severity of the call requires a still alarm or first alarm response. When there is doubt the first alarm assignment shall be used as a default.
- An example of a dispatch communication:
  - Tones of each responding department
  - Sample Message:

*A first alarm for a structure fire at 201 South Alton Street,  
Freeburg Card 27-01-01,  
2711, 2717, 2719, 4813 respond.*

The underlined portions of the example will change with the alarm level, incident classification, address, card number, and assignment of each card.

- Repeat the tones and message
- Special instructions and information shall be given to the first responding unit as opposed to adding it to the dispatch message.

The incident commander, to bring additional resources for large-scale incidents, strikes the 2nd through 5th alarm assignments. The dispatch communications for greater alarms are essentially the same as for initial alarms.

The change of quarters assignment is used to make move-ups to the station of the stricken fire department or have equipment and personnel stand by at another designated station for adjusted coverage due to the incident.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

Standardized procedures for the implementation and operation of box alarm systems at the fire dispatch centers within MABAS Division #32 streamlines the mutual aid process, creating a safer and more effective regional fire service.

## **7.0 ADOPTION**

This advocacy statement edition was adopted by MABAS Division #32, according to Bylaws Article IX, at its regular meeting on Thursday, March 29, 2007.