

• Clear Speech vs. 10-Codes

PSAPs may use what is referred to as clear speech or plain language dispatching instead of 10-codes. This is recommended by the US Department of Homeland Security's National Incident Management System (NIMS) due in part to incident command structure and widespread interoperability. Events that necessitate coordination of efforts between agencies require that everyone involved be able to understand the same radio traffic.

More than twenty years ago a California law enforcement agency initiated an experiment to prove that clear speech radio transmissions were faster and less error prone than the use of 10-codes.

The agency first conducted a review of existing radio dispatch log tapes and counted the number of errors which were either initiated by the telecommunicator (in choosing the incorrect radio code), or by the response units (in interpreting the radio code transmitted by the telecommunicator).

The agency then selected a group of telecommunicators and a group of patrol officers. These individuals were placed in an intensive training program in which they learned words to be used in lieu of codes. For example, "E.T.A." would be used in lieu of "10-26"; "Enroute," rather than "10-17"; and "Out of Service" as opposed to "10-7".

There followed a period of time during which these individuals conducted all radio transmissions using the newly learned clear speech wording between response units and telecommunicators.

At the conclusion of the test period, radio dispatch log tapes were again reviewed and errors counted. The results indicated fewer errors using the clear speech wording than with 10-codes. The agency concluded that clear speech was much better than the use of codes.

The ability for local, state and Federal agencies to work together is imperative to domestic preparedness and technological advances have made great strides toward achieving interoperable radio systems. All of that is of little use if those operating on the systems can't understand what the others are saying. The results of the study done more than twenty years ago may have greater meaning today than it did back then.

Even clear speech or plain language dispatching has its issues. It is surprising how many words sound similar over a radio. Using words that have the same meaning and still sound unique help to eliminate confusion. For example: the words "can" and "can't" are often confused, so "unable" is recommended.

The following examples are additional preferred word choices:

- **AFFIRMATIVE** instead of YES
- **NEGATIVE** instead of NO
- **OBTAIN** instead of GET
- **FORWARD** instead of SEND
- **STAND BY** instead of WAIT

These words are used because they are easy to understand and should not be mistaken for other words or terms. The PSAP's use of clear speech or plain English should:

- Be clear and easy to understand, even when communicating with other entities
- Be utilized by everyone
- Sound professional and business-like