

STATE of MAINE
Concept of Operations Plan (CONOPS)
for Incident Communications Interoperability
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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What is CONOPS, who owns it?

CONOPS is the State Of Maine's plan to bring interoperable tactical communications to on scene first responders. CONOPS provides common frequencies that can be used by Federal, State, County and Local first responders anywhere in the State Of Maine. CONOPS is a collaborative initiative among State Agencies that resulted in the signing, in April of 2006, of a memorandum of agreement between the Maine Emergency Management Agency and the Office of Information Technology, Maine Fire Chiefs Association, Maine Chiefs of Police Association, Maine Sheriffs Association and the Maine Department of Public Safety. The agreement identifies the frequencies and specifies the terms of there use.

Does that mean I must install the CONOPS frequencies in my mobile and portable radios? Who is authorized to install the CONOPS frequencies in their radios?

The State does not mandate the installation of CONOPS frequencies in any radio. In a perfect world all first responder units would be equipped with the however, the CONOPS frequencies may be installed in mobile and portable radios belonging to official public safety departments with first responder responsibilities for use within the State Of Maine.

Should I install the CONOPS frequencies in all my units?

That depends. CONOPS augments local frequencies. It does not replace them. During a large scale incident, talk groups could be established by the incident commander on those local frequencies. If present radios have limited channel capacity, for instance, a jurisdiction may decide to install the CONOPS frequencies in only supervisor's vehicles of some departments.

Can I use the CONOPS frequencies on a daily basis?

Terms of the CONOPS agreement authorize use only when an official CONOPS operation has been requested by an Incident Commander and authorized by MEMA and only for the area affected.

I already have authorization to use State Wide Fire on a daily basis. Does this mean I can no longer use the frequency unless there is a CONOPS event?

CONOPS does not negate any existing authorizations. Day-to-day use of the frequencies by properly licensed entities is unaffected. However, if a CONOPS operation is ongoing regular use of the frequency in the area should be suspended until the CONOPS operation is concluded.

Why don't I need an FCC license for the CONOPS frequencies in my radios?

With few exceptions all radio transmitters must be licensed by the FCC. The CONOPS frequencies are licensed to the State of Maine for mobile/portable use statewide. Use of the frequencies for CONOPS activities are authorized under that license. Authorization to install CONOPS frequencies in base stations is beyond the scope of the CONOPS Plan.

Why not install CONOPS frequencies in my base station?

CONOPS is intended to provide common interoperability channels for on-scene tactical communications among responders who may come from distant areas and represent multiple levels of government. The Incident Commander allocates the channels according to his incident communications plan. That plan would utilize existing local base station frequencies for base to mobile traffic so that portable to portable communications are not overridden by base station traffic.

Who can request a CONOPS authorization?

A jurisdiction that has an established Incident Command System structure compliant with the National Incident Management System and sufficient to manage multi-governmental level, a multi-agency response to a major emergency may have its designated Incident Commander request a CONOPS authorization if the event meets the criteria of the CONOPS plan.

Smaller jurisdictions can request the assistance of their regional IMAT through their County Emergency Management Agency.

Can the CONOPS frequencies be used for training?

The CONOPS frequencies can be used for training and exercise purposes. We must remember that these frequencies are used daily by the licensed agencies so prior arrangements must be coordinated through MEMA.

In all cases exercise traffic must immediately be suspended if a real event takes place. All exercise traffic must include the phrase "This is a drill".