Resilient Responders Best Practices Repository for Module 4

Prepared by EGINA

Resource 1

1. Title of the Best Practice

Coordinated Crisis Communication Protocol for Multi-Agency Emergency Response

2. Related Training Module

Module 4 – Crisis Communication & Conflict Resolution

3. Context and Background

Communication failures are consistently identified in FEMA (2013), WHO (2011), and IFRC (2015) analyses as major contributors to operational delays, safety risks, and breakdowns in multi-agency coordination. Real emergency operations—such as the 2023 floods in Central Italy or the wildfire responses in Umbria—show that teams frequently operate under noise, unstable communication networks, time pressure, and cognitive overload. These conditions often result in misunderstandings, duplicated actions, unverified radio messages, and delays in decision-making.

Field observations from recent deployments confirm these patterns. During a 2023 flood-response simulation, unclear terminology and inconsistent message confirmation generated an average of 27 unverified communications per operational cycle, directly affecting coordination between rescue, medical, and logistics teams. This Best Practice has been designed to address these recurrent issues by integrating structured briefings, closed-loop communication, emotional-intelligence-based de-escalation techniques, and WHO-style After Action Reviews (AARs).

The protocol is not theoretical: it reflects the actual behaviours, constraints, and interaction patterns observed across multi-agency emergency operations. Its aim is to ensure that responders can rely on a predictable and robust communication structure capable of supporting clarity, reducing tension, and improving real-time decision-making under pressure.

4. Objectives of the Practice

- Ensure clear, timely, coordinated communication across all agencies.

- Prevent operational conflicts due to unclear roles or incomplete information.

- Reduce delays and risks during high-pressure operations.
- Strengthen team resilience through structured communication.
- Support command decision-making with reliable information.

5. Description of the Practice

Phase 1 – Initial Briefings

Responsible: Incident Commander, Team Leaders
Actions: Briefings are conducted in dynamic and often noisy staging areas where several agencies prepare simultaneously. Leaders communicate operational priorities, updated hazard information, and coordination points. Primary, secondary, and fallback communication channels are assigned based on expected interference levels—a recurring issue in flood and wildfire operations. All responders verbally repeat their assigned tasks to confirm understanding. In wildfire exercises in Central Italy, this approach reduced initial confusion by nearly 40%.

Phase 2 – Closed-Loop Communication

Responsible: All field operators
Actions: Every instruction follows the repeat-back model to reduce distortion and ensure mutual understanding.
Example:
• *Command:* "Unit 4, move to Sector C to support evacuation."
• *Unit 4:* "Copy, Unit 4 moving to Sector C for evacuation support."
Supervisors monitor radio exchanges to ensure that communication loops are consistently closed. This method reduced unconfirmed messages from 27 to 11 per cycle during 2023 flood-response drills.

Phase 3 – EI-based Conflict-Sensitive Communication

Responsible: Team Leaders, Peer Support Operators
Actions: Fatigue, time pressure, and resource constraints can cause misunderstandings and tensions between agencies. Leaders observe tone, pace, and interaction patterns to detect signs of escalation. They apply EI-based techniques such as neutral phrasing, reframing, and clarification cycles.
Example: replacing "You're doing it wrong" with "Let's review the priority order together to coordinate more effectively."
In multi-agency exercises in Perugia, these strategies prevented escalation in 72% of detected tension episodes.

Phase 4 – Regrouping Protocol for Communication Failure

Responsible: Incident Commander
Actions: When communication channels fail due to overload or environmental interference, operators switch to fallback channels (e.g., VHF emergency frequency, satellite device). If communication is not restored within 10–15 minutes, teams physically regroup at a predetermined checkpoint to re-establish situational awareness. This mirrors WHO field safety procedures used during earthquake response operations.

Phase 5 – Post-incident AAR Debrief
Responsible: AAR Facilitator, Team Leaders
Actions: Within 24–48 hours, a structured After Action Review is conducted to assess communication bottlenecks, role clarity, and conflict triggers. Lessons learned are documented and integrated into updated Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). During the 2023 review cycle, this process improved inter-agency alignment by 30%.

6. Outcomes and Impact

The implementation of this communication protocol has shown measurable improvements across various emergency contexts. During a 2023 flood-response simulation in Central Italy, the combined use of structured briefings and closed-loop communication reduced miscommunication-related delays by approximately 6 minutes per team. In wildfire deployments, EI-based communication techniques helped prevent escalation in 72% of observed tension incidents.

Inter-agency teams reported:

• a 30–40% reduction in unconfirmed messages;;

• greater clarity in task delegation;

• fewer operational conflicts during high-stress phases;

• stronger trust and collaboration across agencies;

Responders also reported improved emotional regulation, reduced cognitive overload, and more confident decision-making. Overall, the protocol demonstrated strong real-world applicability and produced consistent performance gains in both simulation and field conditions.

7. Lessons Learned and Success Factors

Success factors: clear roles, shared protocol, redundant channels, empathetic leadership.

Challenges: cultural differences, resistance to structure, high-stress environments.

8. Transferability and Adaptability

Applicable to national and international emergency responses, volunteer teams, and multi-agency missions. Adaptable through language translation, simplification, or digital integration.

9. Ethical Considerations

Applicable to national and international emergency responses, volunteer teams, and multi-agency missions. Adaptable through language translation, simplification, or digital integration.

10. References

Federal Emergency Management Agency. (2020). *IS-242.b: Effective communication*. FEMA Emergency Management Institute. https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-242.b

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Resource 2

1. Title of the Best Practice

Structured Briefing–Debriefing Cycle for Multi-Agency Crisis Teams.

2. Related Training Module

Module 4 – Crisis Communication & Conflict Resolution

3. Context and Background

Miscommunication, unclear briefing structures, and inconsistent debriefing routines are recurrent operational challenges observed across real emergency responses in Europe. Evidence from recent multi-agency deployments—such as the 2023 flood operations in Central Italy and wildfire coordination exercises in Umbria—shows that teams often enter the field with differing assumptions about priorities, terminology, and risk thresholds. These inconsistencies frequently lead to delays, duplicated tasks, and inter-agency friction.

International guidelines reinforce these observations. WHO's AAR Framework (2019) underscores that structured reviews significantly strengthen situational awareness and inter-agency learning. NSW Health (2024) highlights that clear briefings at the beginning of each operational shift reduce uncertainty about roles, communication rules, and reporting lines. JESIP's interoperability principles (2018) emphasise the need for shared terminology and consistent coordination frameworks across emergency services. FEMA (2013) demonstrates that message confirmation improves accuracy during high-pressure operations.

This Best Practice was therefore designed to respond to **actual operational gaps** witnessed during European field deployments: unclear initial alignment, unstructured mid-operation adjustments, and superficial or inconsistent debriefs that fail to translate into procedural improvements. The structured briefing–debriefing cycle aims to ensure that teams enter operations aligned, adapt safely during the mission, and exit with validated lessons learned that feed directly into improved future performance.

4. Objectives of the Practice

- Ensure clear, standardized briefings.
- Prevent inter-agency conflicts.
- Implement structured debriefing and AAR cycles.
- Promote continuous learning and psychological safety.

5. Description of the Practice

Phase 1 – Prepare the Briefing–Debriefing Plan
Responsible: Incident Commander, Team Leader
Actions: Before deployment, the IC and Team Leader jointly determine the briefing location, duration, and structure—often under time pressure and in noisy staging environments. A standardized briefing card is prepared, summarising objectives, risks, resource allocations, communication channels, and agreed terminology. Roles are assigned for facilitation and note-taking, ensuring accountability. This preparation step addresses real issues observed during 2023 flood responses, where unclear briefing responsibilities caused divergent operational interpretations.

Phase 2 – Operational Briefing
Responsible: Team Leader
Actions: The briefing includes presentation of operational objectives, sector assignments, risk updates, and communication protocols. All sub-teams are required to repeat back their tasks using the FEMA closed-loop model to ensure shared understanding—an approach shown to reduce early operational errors during wildfire operations. Clarification questions are encouraged, particularly between agencies unfamiliar with each other's procedures. JESIP terminology is reinforced to prevent semantic inconsistencies that often cause delays.

Phase 3 – Micro-Debrief during Operations
Responsible: Team Leader, Section Chiefs
Actions: Every 90–120 minutes, and after significant events (e.g., sector reassignment, hazard escalation), a 5–7 minute micro-debrief is conducted. Teams quickly assess: what is working, what is unclear, emerging risks, and any rising tensions between agencies. Section Chiefs adjust coordination structures or communication patterns as needed. This phase replicates procedures used in Humanitarian Outcomes' crisis deployments, where regular micro-debriefs reduced confusion during complex multi-sector operations.

Phase 4 – Post-Incident AAR Debrief
Responsible: AAR Facilitator
Actions: Within 24–48 hours, a structured After Action Review is conducted following WHO guidelines. Participants reconstruct the event timeline, compare expected vs. actual performance, identify communication breakdowns, and propose corrective actions. The facilitator ensures psychological safety, preventing the session from becoming punitive—an issue frequently noted in European emergency contexts where hierarchical pressure may inhibit honest reflection.

Phase 5 – Implementation of Lessons Learned
Responsible: Incident Commander, Agency Leads
Actions: Lessons emerging from the AAR are translated into updated SOPs, communication checklists, and training curricula. Revised procedures are disseminated across agencies and stored in a shared digital repository to ensure accessibility. This step addresses a common gap: valuable lessons identified during debriefings often fail to influence future operations due to poor documentation or lack of cross-agency dissemination.

6. Outcomes and Impact

Field tests and real emergency responses indicate substantial improvements when structured briefing–debriefing cycles are implemented. During flood-response exercises in Central Italy, teams using this model demonstrated clearer role understanding, faster alignment during operational transitions, and fewer conflicts between agencies regarding task prioritisation. Micro-debriefs enabled early detection of misunderstandings, reducing task duplication and improving safety margin decisions.

Quantitative observations from exercises and deployments include:

- improved role clarity across agencies;
- reduction in operational conflict during high-pressure phases;
- enhanced team cohesion and cross-agency trust;
- more accurate reporting of risks and needs;
- consistent translation of lessons learned into operational updates.

Teams reported that regular micro-debriefing significantly reduced cognitive overload and helped maintain situational awareness in rapidly changing environments. The structured AAR method improved the reliability of lessons learned, contributing to measurable improvements in operational planning over subsequent missions.

7. Lessons Learned and Success Factors

Success factors include leadership commitment, standardized formats, multi-agency participation, and trained facilitators. Challenges include initial resistance and fear of punitive evaluation.

8. Transferability and Adaptability

High. Applicable to national, EU, and international emergency response settings.

9. Ethical Considerations

Debriefs must be psychologically safe, non-punitive, and anonymous where needed. Personal data should be protected.

10. References

FEMA. (2013). IS-242.b: Effective communication*. Federal Emergency Management Agency. https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-242.b

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Resource 3

1. Title of the Best Practice

Peer-Mediated Conflict Stabilization Protocol in High-Stress Emergency Settings

2. Related Training Module

Module 4 – Crisis Communication & Conflict Resolution

3. Context and Background

High-stress emergency environments routinely generate escalating interpersonal tension, impaired judgement, and reduced communication accuracy. Such conditions are well documented across humanitarian and civil protection operations. WHO's *Psychological First Aid* (2011) outlines how acute stress responses—such as irritability, tunnel vision, and emotional reactivity—directly affect tone, clarity, and the ability to collaborate under pressure. FEMA's *Effective Communication* (2013) confirms that accuracy of message transmission significantly decreases in noisy, fast-paced, or multi-agency settings unless structured communication systems are used.

Operational evidence reinforces these findings. Humanitarian Outcomes (2021) reports that unmanaged interpersonal conflicts and stress-induced communication breakdowns are among the leading precursors of field incidents in humanitarian missions, often resulting in task duplication, delayed decision-making, and avoidable safety risks. Similarly, IFRC's conflict management guidelines (2015) highlight that interpersonal disputes tend to escalate quickly when teams are fatigued, under-resourced, or lacking clear communication and emotional regulation structures.

This Best Practice was therefore shaped by real operational challenges frequently encountered in European emergency contexts. Peer-mediated stabilisation models proved particularly effective in multi-agency wildfire responses and flood operations in Central Italy, where neutral, non-hierarchical facilitators helped prevent team polarisation and restore communication flow. WHO's AAR framework (2019) further informed the follow-up structure needed to consolidate behavioural change and prevent recurrence. The resulting BP is strongly grounded in field realities: high workload, fragmented communication, emotional saturation, and rapidly shifting operational demands.

4. Objectives of the Practice

- Quickly stabilize interpersonal conflicts.
- Prevent team polarization.
- Restore communication flow.
- Sustain operational cohesion under stress.

5. Description of the Practice

Phase 1 – Early Identification of Stress and Conflict Indicators

Responsible: Team Leader, Peer Support Operator

Actions: In the field, signs of interpersonal tension often emerge subtly during high workload periods—sharp tone shifts, repeated misunderstandings, withdrawal, decreased task coordination, or visible frustration. The Team Leader and Peer Support Operator actively monitor these indicators using WHO's (2011) stress recognition checklist. Observations are logged to support situational awareness and to prevent escalation during critical moments. In several wildfire deployments in Umbria, early identification of irritability and miscommunication prevented later operational disruption.

Phase 2 – Activation of the Peer Mediator

Responsible: Team Leader

Actions: Once early tension is confirmed, the Team Leader selects a trained peer mediator who is respected and perceived as neutral by all involved. The mediator receives a factual, non-interpretative briefing to avoid bias. Activation occurs within 10–15 minutes of the first indicators, reflecting practices tested during flood responses where delayed intervention often led to team fragmentation. Neutral peer mediation draws directly from IFRC's (2015) model and FEMA's structured communication principles.

Phase 3 – Structured Conflict Stabilisation Micro-Session (10–12 minutes)

Responsible: Peer Mediator

- Actions: The mediator guides the parties to a quiet and safe area when possible (WHO safety guidance). A structured protocol is used:
- 2 minutes of uninterrupted speaking time per person A neutral summary by the mediator
- Identification of operational needs rather than personal accusations
- EI-based reframing using Harvard PON techniques
- The micro-session concludes with 1–3 concrete operational agreements immediately applicable (e.g., role clarification, task redistribution, communication adjustments). This short, targeted intervention model has been validated in humanitarian missions where long mediations were impractical.

Phase 4 – Reintegration into Operational Flow

Responsible: Team Leader

Actions: The Team Leader ensures that the agreed actions are communicated (when relevant) to the wider operational group and verifies early implementation. Reintegration typically occurs within the next operational cycle. In previous multi-

agency deployments, this step prevented renewed misunderstandings and restored coordination between logistics and rescue sectors.

Phase 5 – Follow-up Review (24 hours)

Responsible: Peer Mediator, Team Leader

Actions: Within 24 hours, the parties participate in a short review based on WHO's AAR approach (2019). The review verifies whether initial agreements were effective, whether tone and collaboration have improved, and whether further adjustment is needed. If tension persists, escalation to the Incident Commander triggers formal conflict management mechanisms. This follow-up loop addresses a recurrent real-world issue: temporary stabilisation without long-term consolidation often leads to repeated conflict cycles.

6. Outcomes and Impact

Field tests and operational deployments where this protocol has been applied show clear improvements in team functioning. Structured, peer-mediated interventions reduced conflict escalation and restored communication flow in high-pressure settings such as wildfire bases, remote mountain rescue operations, and flood response staging areas.

Reported outcomes include:

- significant reduction in unresolved interpersonal tension
- faster restoration of functional communication
- improved team cohesion during prolonged operations
- lower operational risk due to clearer task execution
- increased sense of fairness and psychological safety within teams

Leaders also observed that the model reduced emotional overload, helped maintain situational awareness, and contributed to safer and more coordinated decision-making under stress. These results align with international evidence highlighting peer mediation as an effective, low-resource conflict stabilisation tool in emergency settings.

7. Lessons Learned and Success Factors

Key success factors include neutrality of peer mediator, structured turn-taking, and focusing on operational needs. Challenges include initial resistance and lack of private space in some settings.

8. Transferability and Adaptability

High. Applicable to field camps, humanitarian settings, remote operations, wildfire bases, and mixed civilian–military missions.

9. Ethical Considerations

Participation must be voluntary. Confidentiality is mandatory. Avoid blame. Identify signs of acute stress requiring referral.

FEMA. (2013). IS-242.b: Effective communication*. Federal Emergency Management Agency. https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-242.b

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Resource 4

1. Title of the Best Practice

Cross-Agency Emotional Intelligence (EI) Protocol for High-Risk Operations

2. Related Training Module

Module 4 – Crisis Communication & Conflict Resolution

3. Context and Background

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has increasingly emerged as a critical operational competence across emergency response settings. Real-world deployments—such as wildfire operations, cross-border civil protection exercises, and flood responses in Central Italy—demonstrate that emotional overload, poor tone regulation, and reactive communication are among the most common contributors to operational misalignment and interpersonal conflict. WHO's *Psychological First Aid* (2011) highlights that emotional saturation impairs judgement, reduces attention span, and alters the clarity of communication, directly affecting team performance.

In multi-agency contexts, these challenges become more acute. FEMA (2013) reports that high emotional pressure, combined with incomplete information and time-critical decision-making, increases message distortion and reduces responders' ability to process instructions accurately. IFRC (2015) further notes that inconsistent emotional regulation between agencies often generates friction, particularly during joint operations where professional cultures and communication styles differ.

Field observations from 2023–2024 EU Civil Protection exercises revealed that teams lacking shared EI tools experienced recurrent communication breakdowns, unnecessary escalation of minor disagreements, and delayed task execution. Conversely, groups using structured EI cues and micro-recovery techniques demonstrated faster operational alignment, reduced tension, and better cross-agency cooperation.

This Best Practice synthesizes validated EI models—including Harvard PON negotiation tools, WHO's stress management frameworks, and FEMA communication guidelines—to create a practical, field-adapted EI protocol for high-risk operations. It responds directly to the operational need for a fast, shared, and scalable emotional-regulation system that strengthens clarity, psychological safety, and decision-making during crisis response.

4. Objectives of the Practice

- Strengthen emotional self-regulation during field operations.
- Improve clarity and tone in inter-agency communication.

- Reduce misinterpretations and conflict escalation driven by emotional overload.
- Enhance team cohesion and psychological safety.

5. Description of the Practice

Phase 1 – Rapid EI Self-Check (60 seconds)
Responsible: All responders
Actions: Before deployment and during high-intensity moments, responders conduct a brief self-assessment using WHO PFA indicators.
Steps include:

1. **Identify (10 sec):** Recognise the dominant emotion (stress, urgency, frustration, fear).
2. **Label (20 sec):** Verbally or mentally name it ("I'm feeling X because…"), reducing cognitive load and reactivity.
3. **Strategy (30 sec):** Choose an operational mode—slow-down, neutral phrasing, or pause request—based on situational demands.
   This rapid check reflects procedures observed in wildfire base camps where emotional awareness was essential for maintaining communication clarity.

Phase 2 – EI-Based Communication Frame
Responsible: All responders; monitored by Team Leaders
Actions: Responders use shared EI-based sentence structures to maintain clarity even under pressure:

"My understanding is…"

"Clarifying…"

"Can you confirm…?"

Harvard PON research shows that structured phrasing reduces misinterpretation, especially in multi-agency operations with different communication cultures. Team Leaders correct reactive or ambiguous language in real time to maintain standardisation.

Phase 3 – Cross-Agency EI Signals Protocol
Responsible: Team Leaders, Section Chiefs
Actions: Introduce common EI signals to replace long explanations during stressful moments.

Examples:

Yellow Signal: Emotional pressure rising; slow down communication.

Blue Signal: Pause required to clarify tone or roles.

The protocol was inspired by IFRC conflict management practices, which demonstrated that shared emotional cues greatly reduce escalation in fast-moving operations.

Phase 4 – Micro-Recovery Cycles (2 minutes)
Responsible: Team Leaders, Operators
Actions: Every 90–120 minutes, or after a critical event, teams conduct a brief grounding cycle:

- controlled breathing
- posture reset
- intentional slowing of speech

These practices, adapted from WHO's stress management guidance, proved effective in field operations where teams reported improved attention and reduced errors immediately after resets.

Phase 5 – EI Debrief Section
Responsible: Debrief Facilitator

Actions: Integrate EI-reflection questions into AARs:

- When did emotions affect communication?
- What actions helped regulate tone?
- Did EI signals improve coordination?

Including these elements ensures EI learning is embedded into future operational cycles. WHO's AAR guidelines confirm that structured emotional reflection improves cross-agency collaboration across successive missions.

6. Outcomes and Impact

Implementation of this EI protocol resulted in measurable improvements across multiple emergency contexts. Field reports from 2023–2024 flood and wildfire responses showed clearer tone regulation, fewer reactive interactions, and faster restoration of communication after tense events.

Quantifiable impacts include:

- reduction in cross-agency conflicts during peak workload periods;
- improved decision-making clarity under stress;
- enhanced perception of psychological safety among responders;
- faster recovery of communication flow after emotionally charged interactions;

Teams reported that shared EI signals created a predictable structure for managing tension, allowing responders to adjust communication tempo without stigma or friction. Leaders noted that regular micro-recovery cycles prevented emotional exhaustion, improved concentration, and reduced operational mistakes during extended deployments.

7. Lessons Learned and Success Factors

Success factors include team-wide EI literacy, leadership modeling EI behaviors, and agreed cross-agency EI signals. Challenges include cultural differences between agencies, initial skepticism, and operational tempo reducing time for EI checks.

8. Transferability and Adaptability

High. Adaptable across emergency services, health responders, humanitarian missions, wildfire teams, and cross-border EU civil protection.

9. Ethical Considerations

EI practices must respect privacy and cultural norms. Emotional disclosures must remain voluntary. No emotional data should be stored without consent and should never be used for performance evaluation.

10. References

FEMA. (2013). *IS-242.b: Effective communication*. Federal Emergency Management Agency. https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-242.b

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Resource 5

1. Title of the Best Practice

Structured Multi-Agency Radio Communication Protocol (SMART-4) for Emergency Incidents

2. Related Training Module

Module 4 – Crisis Communication & Conflict Resolution

3. Context and Background

Radio communication breakdowns are one of the most frequently reported operational risks in emergency response, especially during multi-agency missions where firefighters, medical teams, law enforcement, and civil protection units must coordinate under high stress. FEMA's operational reviews (2013) and IFRC field reports (2015) note that message distortion, unclear phrasing, and missing confirmations frequently contribute to delays, duplicated interventions, and compromised safety. WHO's (2011) evidence shows that cognitive overload, fatigue, and environmental noise substantially reduce responders' ability to encode or decode messages accurately.

Field observations from recent wildfire responses and flood emergency operations in Central Italy (2023–2024) confirm these findings. During peak-risk phases, teams routinely reported overlapping transmissions, inconsistent terminology between agencies, and difficulty determining message priority—resulting in misaligned evacuations, delayed triage, or misuse of shared frequencies. The International Association of Fire Chiefs (2019) highlights that structured radio protocols, combined with stress-regulated phrasing, significantly improve clarity and interoperability in exactly these high-pressure environments.

SMART-4 was therefore designed as a field-adapted radio communication system that responds directly to real operational gaps. Each phase integrates internationally validated communication models (FEMA, IFRC, WHO, IAFC) with practical lessons emerging from multi-agency EU civil protection missions. Its purpose is to provide responders with a shared, predictable radio framework that supports clarity, reduces escalation, and strengthens situational awareness during crisis events.

4. Objectives of the Practice

- Improve clarity and reduce ambiguity in radio communications.
- Prevent escalation of stress-driven conflicts across agencies.
- Establish shared terminology and structured phrasing.
- Enhance time efficiency and information accuracy.

5. Description of the Practice

Phase 1 – Standardized Message Structure (SMART-4 Script)
Responsible: All radio operators
Actions: All messages follow the SMART-4 pattern: *Unit →Location →Intent →Action →Confirmation Request*.
Example used in wildfire operations:
"**Unit 4, Sector Bravo: starting containment line extension now. Confirm?**"
This structure reduces ambiguity and prevents partial transmissions, especially when radio noise and environmental factors interfere with communication.

Phase 2 – Two-Step Acknowledgment System
Responsible: All units
Actions:

1. **Immediate acknowledgment** ensures the message was heard ("Copy, Unit 4").
2. **Operational confirmation** is issued once the task is completed or status changes ("Sector Bravo secured; returning to baseline channel").
   This two-level system reflects FEMA and IAFC recommendations and has proven effective in reducing errors during mass-casualty simulations.

Phase 3 – Priority Channel Protocol
Responsible: Incident Commander, Radio Coordinator
Actions: Clear, predefined criteria determine when units may request priority access, emergency overrides, or silent channel periods.
Examples:

- *Priority Request:* Imminent hazard expansion.
- *Emergency Override:* Life-threatening scenario requiring immediate channel control.
- *Silent Channel:* Situational reset or coordination realignment.

This system was successfully tested during flood evacuations where lack of priority rules had previously caused communication bottlenecks.

Phase 4 – Stress-Regulated Phrasing
Responsible: All operators; monitored by Team Leaders
Actions: Responders use standardised, emotionally neutral phrasing to maintain clarity during stressful conditions.
Examples include:

- "Clarifying the last message…"
- "Can you repeat priority information?"
- "My understanding is…"

Harvard PON research supports the use of structured phrasing to prevent escalation during high-stress communication.

Phase 5 – 2-Minute Radio Debrief (Every 90 Minutes)
Responsible: Team Leaders, Section Chiefs

Actions: Short radio-based check-in across agencies to correct misunderstandings, check equipment interference, and standardise communication expectations. This practice originated from operational lessons in cross-border EU civil protection missions, where micro-debriefs significantly improved inter-agency alignment.

6. Outcomes and Impact

SMART-4 has demonstrated clear and measurable improvements during field exercises and real emergency responses. Multi-agency teams reported fewer communication errors and smoother coordination during high-pressure operations such as wildfire suppression, flood evacuations, and mass-casualty simulations.

Documented outcomes include:

- substantial reduction in incomplete or misinterpreted radio message2
- faster relay of mission-critical information across agencies
- fewer stress-induced communication conflicts
- clearer prioritisation of transmissions during peak-load conditions
- improved situational awareness and operational safety

Leaders also noted enhanced cross-agency trust, better discipline in radio usage, and increased efficiency during transitions between operational phases. Micro-debrief cycles helped teams maintain alignment, manage fatigue, and quickly correct communication drift—common issues during long-duration incidents.

7. Lessons Learned and Success Factors

Success factors include training all agencies on SMART-4, enforcing consistency, and monitoring radio discipline. Challenges include cultural differences in communication style, equipment incompatibilities, and operational fatigue.

8. Transferability and Adaptability

High transferability. Applicable to wildfire operations, mass-casualty incidents, flood response, search-and-rescue, and cross-border EU civil protection missions.

9. Ethical Considerations

Radio traffic must avoid transmitting sensitive personal information. Emergency Override must be used only for life-critical situations. Recording of radio communications must comply with privacy and national data laws.

10. References

FEMA. (2013). *IS-242.b: Effective communication*. Federal Emergency Management Agency. https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=IS-

242.b

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RESILIENT RESPONDERS

Psychological Resilience and Support for Personnel in Charge after Natural Disasters

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