

Radio Protocol Basics



First, when setting up a radio network, agree in advance on the frequency (or channel) you and your teams will use.

Face in the direction of the station you are calling so your body does not block the signal. Hold radio vertical and talk across, not into the microphone.

Keep calm, and keep your voice calm, even if you are not. Use clear, plain language and a normal tone. Shouting into the microphone, even when you are in a noisy environment, only distorts the signal.

Remember: Hand-held radios are not like a phone. You cannot hear others when you are sending a message, and vice versa.

How to Make a Call

1. **THINK FIRST** of what you wish to say in short, clear sentences.
2. Push **Press to Talk (PTT)** or transmit button, **HOLD IT DOWN**, count one second and then begin talking.
3. State the name or unit you are calling, your team ID and then say "Over."

CERT Command, this is Team 3. Over.

Count one second and **release the transmit button**.

4. Wait to be recognized before you continue. You will hear:
Team 3, this is CERT Command. Go ahead. Over.

Only after you are recognized should you send your message. Keep it brief, end with "Over."

5. If CERT Command is busy and cannot take your call right away, they may respond with:
Team Three this is CERT Command. Stand by.

6. **Remember** that even when you are engaged back and forth with CERT Command, you still identify yourself in every message.

How to Break into a Call in Progress

1. Don't interrupt an active conversation unless you have an **urgent** message. To interrupt, say:
Break-break, CERT Command, this is Team 3. Priority message. Over.

Wait for a response:

This is CERT Command, Breaker go ahead. Over.

How to End a Call

1. Hold down the transmit button, confirm you understood the message, state the team name and say "Out."

CERT Command, message is understood. Team 3 out.

TIP:

"Over" means you've finished speaking and expect a response.

"Out" means the call has ended and you no longer expect a response.

Radio Best Practices

- Listen before pressing the PTT button and starting to speak! There may be a conversation progress already. Only if you have a life-and-death emergency is it okay to interrupt.
- When carrying a radio on a CERT team, do not turn down the volume while you are dealing with a situation no matter how tense. If CERT command is trying to reach you and you cannot hear them, they will assume you are in trouble and may send out a rescue team to your last location. If you have to turn the radio off, or leave the radio, call CERT Command to tell them that beforehand.
- When you use the radio, make sure you are holding the antenna vertically, so that it points straight up—NOT over-the shoulder like a cell phone. Speak across the front of the radio, not directly into it, and always (even in noisy situations) in a normal and calm tone of voice. Shouting into the radio will distort the signal and make it difficult (or impossible) for the other end to understand you.
- Face in the direction of the station you are trying to contact; radio waves do not carry through water, and you are (mostly) water!
- It is also essential that you speak calmly, even in a stressful situation. Panic is highly contagious, especially when heard over the radio. Don't cause others to panic, take a deep breath after pressing the PTT to calm down.
- If CERT Command does not immediately acknowledge your initial call, wait a few moments before calling again. It is entirely possible that they are trying to handle many different tasks, dealing with their EOC (Emergency Operation Center) or another team's requests on another channel (frequency), and cannot immediately respond.

After your second or third call, they may well respond with a brief

Team Three, CERT Command; stand by.

That's a sure sign they're crazy busy. Wait patiently, but don't be surprised if they forget that you are standing by. After a while, try again. If it's an urgent matter, tell them:

CERT Command, Team Three standing by with a priority message.

- Always, always carry extra batteries or battery pack for your radio and keep your radio as dry as possible.