



# ANN ARBOR FIRE DEPARTMENT

## Standard Operating Procedures – 3.15 Mayday



### MAYDAY

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Effective: September 12, 2024  
 Scheduled Review: September 12, 2027  
 Approved: Fire Chief Mike Kennedy

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#### I. PUPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide a unified fire ground procedure for a “mayday” situation.

#### II. DEFINITION

“Mayday” is a term utilized to report a firefighter(s) who is lost, trapped, or in imminent danger within the fire ground. Mayday is not an emergency evacuation call.

#### III. RESPONSIBILITY

It is imperative that all personnel understand this procedure; as it shall be the sole method for personnel who find themselves or others in a life-threatening situation to communicate such an emergency at any incident.

#### IV. MAYDAY DESCRIPTION

A mayday is declared in any of the following situations:

- A mayday is defined as anytime an individual cannot safely exit an Immediate Dangerous to Life or Health (IDLH) hazard zone.
- A mayday shall be declared for any unit operating inside of an IDLH hazard zone that does not answer their portable radio after three (3) attempts.

#### V. MAYDAY PROCEDURE

Mayday studies and national statistics show that approximately 80% of maydays are resolved by:

1. The firefighter having the mayday; who performs a self-rescue.
2. The firefighter’s own crew members perform the rescue.
3. Another company already working in the hazard zone performs the rescue.
4. Or a combination of all three of the above.

Based on this information and the natural reactions of other firefighters working in and around the hazard zone to come to the immediate aid of firefighters who are in trouble, the Incident Commander (IC) and command staff team shall utilize the “Help Order” during a mayday operation.

The “Help Order” is the order in which an IC or a Sector/Division (S/D) supervisor will try to assist a firefighter who is experiencing a mayday. This order shall consist of the following operational elements:

1. Communicating to a lost firefighter self-rescue techniques to assist with the rescue.
2. Using a mayday firefighter(s) own company to assist with the rescue.
3. Using a company already located inside of the hazard zone to assist with the rescue.
4. Using an on-deck company located outside of the hazard zone as a rapid intervention crew.



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The following is the basis for actions in the event of a declared mayday:

The signal for missing/lost/trapped emergency personnel is the radio or verbal transmission of “Mayday, Mayday, Mayday.”

The “mayday” transmission shall continue until acknowledged by the IC. In the event the IC does not acknowledge the initially declared mayday, Fire Dispatch shall announce “Emergency Radio Traffic Only”, and subsequently attempt to contact and advise (repeatedly, if necessary) the IC of such a declared mayday situation.

Upon hearing a “mayday” declaration, the IC shall immediately acknowledge a mayday has been declared and announce, “Emergency Radio Traffic Only”. At this time, all routine traffic shall be suspended until the mayday situation has been resolved and cleared by the IC.

The IC shall be responsible for the management of the declared mayday, while assigning and declaring a transfer of command of the primary operation to another qualified member. One person cannot manage the incident and the mayday.

All other units operating at the incident scene will maintain radio discipline until the emergency traffic has been cleared by the IC. The next talk group in sequential number is available to the IC.

Personnel who are aware of a missing individual or crew should also declare a “mayday.”

Personnel who declare a mayday should attempt to provide as much information. However, the most critical information for the firefighter having a mayday is #1. who they are (Firefighter Smith, Engine 1-3) and #2 where they are (second floor bravo side). This may be the only information the firefighter in distress can state due to environmental factors. With these two simple data points, the IC can deploy resources. It is understood there are multiple models for declaring a mayday. There is no “wrong” way to declare a mayday. However, the help model will be delayed without knowing “who” and “where”

If possible, personnel who are trapped or disoriented should execute all necessary self-rescue activities to assist in their own rescue to include activating their Personal Alert Safety System (PASS) device after their radio transmission, tapping noises, flashlights, etc.

All fire suppression activities shall continue unless ordered to cease by the IC.

A “NO-PAR” (Personnel Accountability Report) policy shall be in effect once a mayday has been transmitted. This means, unless an operating unit does **not** have a PAR; PAR information shall **not** be transmitted over the operational talkgroup. This reduces the amount of radio traffic transmitted in the initial minutes of a mayday and allows the IC and involved personnel availability of critical airtime to successfully mitigate a mayday situation.

When a mayday is declared, the IC should consider requesting the next box alarm and an advanced life support (ALS) unit for each member experiencing a mayday, e.g., if three firefighters are declaring a mayday, three ALS units should be requested.



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Once the mayday has been controlled and there is adequate response under way, the IC shall contact Fire Dispatch, and clear mayday radio traffic. At this point, all units may resume normal radio traffic.

Due to the strong physical and emotional toll of a mayday incident, the firefighter who had the mayday, the crew of the firefighter who had the mayday, and the personnel who were involved in rescue operations of firefighter(s) should be removed from service for the rest of the incident (and likely rest of the shift). For a quickly resolved incident without injury, this decision will rest with the incident commander in consultation with any higher- ranking officers on scene.