

Memo

To: Darcy Adcock, Director of Human Resources

From: Patrice Sutton, County Administrator
Rebecca Kumar, Assistant Manager, Lake County EMA

Date: 06-03-2025

Re: Reclassification Request for Radio Coordinator from Communications Technician for Lake County EMA

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1. **Requesting Department:** Lake County Administrator's Office/Emergency Management Agency
 2. **Project/Program Title:** Radio Coordinator
 3. **Funding Request:** \$70,400- \$102,080 (Grade 9)
 4. **Budget:** Radio 1101045
 5. **Department/Agency Contact:**
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The purpose of this memo is to request a reclassification to fill the current vacant role of the Communications Technician to a Radio Coordinator for the Lake County Emergency Management Agency (LCEMA). This document will demonstrate the necessity for a higher-level coordinator which directly aligns with LCEMA's workplan and future needs.

Historical Background & Current State:

In the late 1990s, there was a dedicated team of 7 full time employees under the Lake County Radio Department. In 2016, this department was disbanded, and a Communication Specialist (technician) position was relocated to Information Technology (LCIT). In FY22, the Communication Specialist position was relocated to LCEMA. The person who held the role retired in November of 2024 leaving the role vacant, as it remains today. The radio program needs still remain and are increasing in roles, responsibilities and duties. The LCEMA Assistant Manager and the Emergency Management Specialist (EMS) I share the duties, with approximately 30% of the EMS' time allocated to keeping the Radio program afloat under LCEMA. It should be noted

that the Lake County Sheriff's Office currently has 6 FTEs dedicated to radio configurations, programming, repair, and any after-hour radio needs including a primary and alternate FTE in both Waukegan and Libertyville.

Impacts, Issues, & Challenges:

In July 2022, critical Radio programming equipment called a Key Variable Loader (KVL), which costs approximately \$5500, was ordered for LCIT and was misplaced as the technician was unfortunately out on leave. There was an identified gap to having a single point of contact for all programming, equipment, and repair needs for the Lake County Radio program including lack of dedicated personnel to track the KVL. Currently, LCEMA is working with Motorola to track the number of KVLs assigned to Lake County. During this time, many of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) licenses were not renewed on time, therefore causing a longer and more in-depth process to renew the licenses and was conducted by staff in the LCSO Dispatch Center. More recently, a request for a Distributed Antenna System (DAS) for almost \$300,000 was requested from LCSO for radio equipment without notice or prior discussion with EMA. Not having a dedicated subject matter expert for radio makes these types of requests difficult to navigate with a short turnaround time and multiagency collaboration opportunities are lost.

Since Fiscal Year 2023, LCEMA has been working to scope out programmatic goals/needs, with the intention to address deficiencies and to find potential efficiencies within the Radio program, to increase interoperability for pre-planned training and exercises, and response during emergency events. Several gaps were identified that included delayed receipt of critical programming equipment, limited radio communications in the Lake County Jail due to an interference issue and equipment failure, inaccurate inventory with programming equipment, location of vital radio assets, and missed opportunities for training and collaboration with key partners for increased interoperability and for public safety.

EMA is responsible for the acquisition, maintenance, repair, and replacement of 12 Lake County Departments that have radios excluding the Lake County Sheriff's Office. EMA is also responsible for the coordination with the 12 departments for budget projections, regular communications and meetings, and any other requests from the departments. The staff needed to maintain the needs of an entire radio department has not maintained nor been coordinated effectively. This program cannot be sustained with the current staffing model of a technician in an hourly role, the needs of EMA which are after-hours, and during emergencies, and the interagency collaboration and high-level partner coordination that is vital to the EMA program.

One of the largest challenges is the one dedicated professional in radio, besides not having a backup, is an hourly technician that is not an exempt employee like the rest of the LCEMA staff. In late 2023, Lake County Jail radio users noticed radio interference during normal operations. Unfortunately, this issue occurred late in the day on a Friday and required collaboration of many partners to solve the issue. LCEMA, LCIT, Motorola representatives, and FCC operators worked for several days over the weekend to identify and solve the interference issue, which stemmed from newly installed radio equipment in a school in Waukegan. This issue was finally resolved on that Monday, 3 days after the issue was first reported. Without a centralized response and collaborative effort, there were limited radio communications among Lake County Jail staff, who resorted to cell phones as back up communications. This created a safety and security issue for the jail employees, the county government, and larger community. Often, radio equipment alarm

notifications occur after hours, so not having a dedicated coordinator makes it difficult to coordinate repairs in a timely manner.

Potential Risks with Current State:

- An hourly employee (the current Technician role) is not available to assist in after-hour issues or emergencies such as the rest of EMA staff
- No dedicated point of contact for internal departments to regularly interface with for questions, issues, training requests, or individual needs
- Scoping out future programmatic goals, aligning with EMA workplan, developing long term plans, & working with critical partners becomes difficult without higher-level coordination that is needed that does not fit under requirements of hourly employee
- Shift in other EMA staff time (current 30% of EMS' workload) is dedicated to radio with the end-of-life term to current radio inventory
- No dedicated personnel for centralized inventory management of critical public safety asset
- Missed opportunities can include dedication of time to the scoping out of training and exercises that could increase interoperability for pre-planned and emergency events. There are also missed opportunities to collaborate with neighboring Counties who have radio assets and staff and would be involved if a largescale outage event were to occur.
- Potential service issues, radio programming delays, duplications of services, limited asset management, and other potential risks without a position to scope out needs and coordination strategies to ensure interoperability among radio systems and services.
- Another risk/liability is the shift in other EMA staff time to handle aspects of radio that would be normally spent on projects to protect the community and better prepare the program for emergencies.

Operational Needs:

Radio communications are essential during emergencies for interoperability and coordination and are a needed tool when current communication tools are overrun. Communications are essential during natural hazards such as tornadoes, where radio could be an essential tool for life safety and recovery coordination. According to the National Weather Service (2024), there were over 120 tornadoes in Illinois alone in 2023 (triple the amount in 2022), and Illinois saw the most tornadoes in the United States. Radio communication was the primary initial source of communication during the Hurricane Helene and Milton responses in Florida in 2024. Bringing a dedicated coordinator to the EMA team will greatly increase the capacity to provide a critical asset and resource to Lake County.

Multiagency collaboration and partnerships are vital to the LCEMA program and what is done on a daily basis to ensure that the best service is provided to Lake County. LCEMA regularly conducts training and exercises with both internal and external partners to have more effective responses to events in the County. Currently, training and exercise planning and participation is conducted among LCEMA staff and key partners. The current technician role does not allow for continued collaboration for increased interoperability for pre-planned events and emergency responses or for participation in events should the need arise from our surrounding agencies. By not having a dedicated individual to scope, navigate, and coordinate these projects and activities,

potential opportunities may be lost that could have a positive impact on public safety, emergency response, and effective interoperability practices in Lake County. A Radio Coordinator with higher-level coordination who serves on committees that are collaborative working to provide a critical service to all of Lake County would greatly increase EMA's ability to effectively prepare for, plan, train, and respond to all incidents.

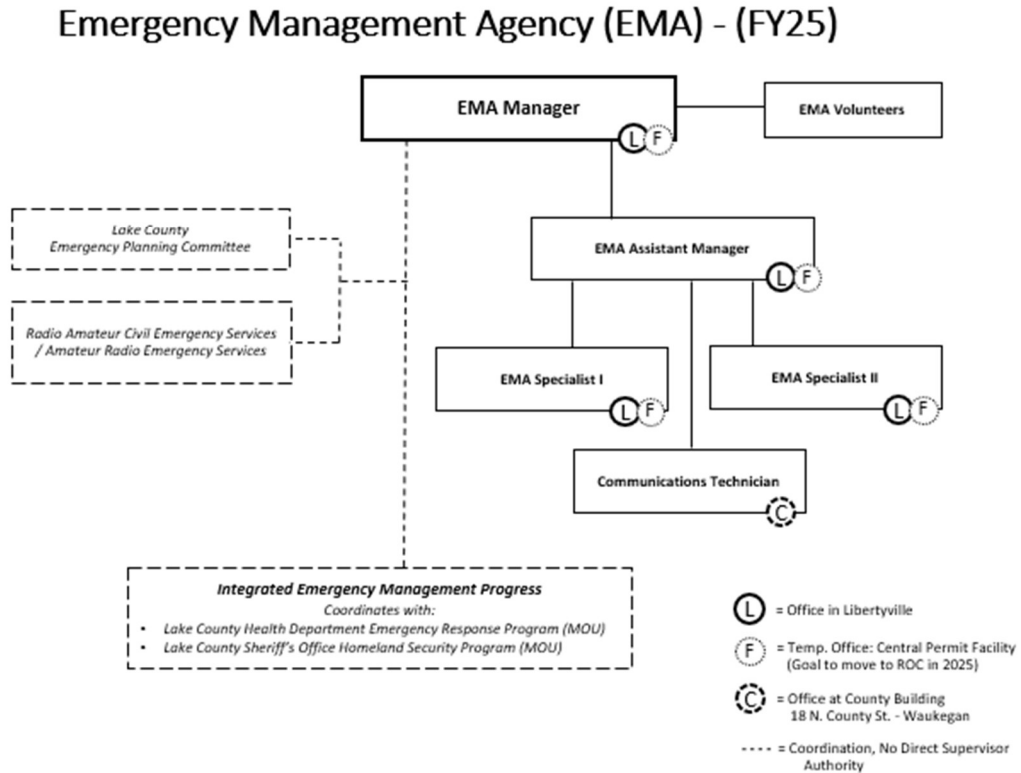
Finally, with EMA taking occupancy in the new ROC next week, the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is now located in a brand-new building. While the strategies may remain the same, there are still extensive policies, user guides, plans, checklists, and other documents that will have to be updated to have the EOC in "warm" status as soon as occupancy is received including radio components of operations. There are also new entities, LakeComm and a Joint Emergency Telephone System Board (JETSB), that have extensive applications with essential data and information that can assist emergency management actions. A Radio Coordinator who can assist with multiagency coordination, collaboration, participation in working groups, development of processes, procedures, and formation of teams to respond to pre-planned and emergency events in the EOC is essential for effective operations.

Budget:

This position is labeled as Communications Technician, funded through the Radio Budget (11010145), and is currently funded through the remainder of this fiscal year. This position is currently vacant since November of 2024 and is under EMA. Any expenses for this newly created position will be submitted through the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) and can be reimbursed up to 50%. Due to the grant funding, the newly created position would be less of a burden on the General Fund than the currently vacant Communications Technician. The increase in hourly pay for the Technician to a salaried Radio Coordinator position reflects the higher-level coordination and responsibilities to better meet evolving operational and programmatic needs for EMA.

Organizational Charts:

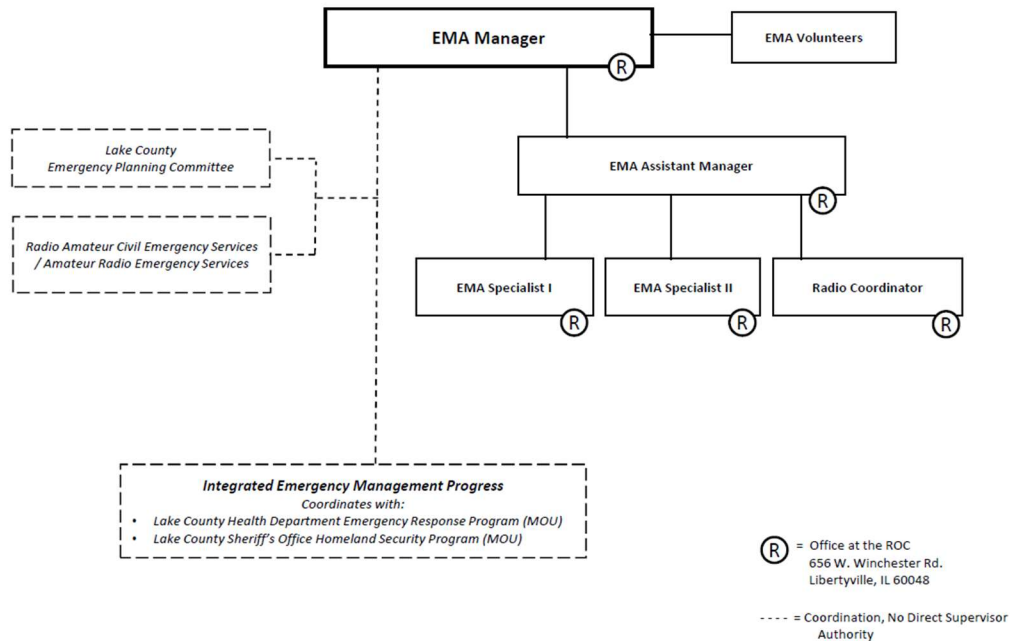
EMA Organization Chart with Communications Technician (Vacant)



December 20, 2024

EMA Organization Chart with Radio Coordinator Position with Reclassification

Emergency Management Agency (EMA) - (FY25)



June 13, 2025

Potential Roles and Responsibilities of Radio Coordinator:

COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE/LIAISON:

- Serve as one of the Chairs or one of the voting members of the Lake County Interoperability Coordinating Council of Lake County (ICCLC); develop strategies and tactics with the committee to ensure interoperability among public safety radio users
- Position serves as the liaison to the Lake County Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services (RACES) to develop strategies and projects around emergency communication support when traditional communication needs fail; participate in trainings, exercises, and events where applicable including the annual RACES Field Day Exercise
- Participate in any working groups where Lake County EMA/Radio can provide subject matter expertise

PLANS:

- Provide updates and ensure that the Tactical Interoperability Communications Plan (TICP), Field Operations Guide (FOG), and Fleet Map are kept updated
- Keep informed of Illinois TICP and Programming Guidance from the Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee's Technology Subcommittee and bring any recommended changes or updates to appropriate committee or audience

- Keep informed of National TICP and FOG and bring any recommended changes or updates to appropriate committee or audience
- Keep informed of the AUXCOMM FOG and Illinois State Ares Emergency Operations All Hazards Guide and bring any recommended changes or updates to appropriate committee or audience
- Keep informed and up to date on the surrounding Illinois counties TICPs and FOGs
- Keep informed on the Wisconsin interoperability plan and their documentation due to the proximity to Lake County

COLLABORATION WITH PARTNERS:

- Work with the JETSB, LakeComm, and other entities on emergency communication and coordination strategies to find linkages between emergency communications and emergency management
- Work with the Illinois Emergency Management Agency under the Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC) to ensure local radios has interoperability with State and Federal partners during large incidents/events
- Coordinate with Lake County Facilities Operations, Lake County Sheriff's Office, and other internal departments on important service work being conducted, outages, upgrades and updates, and other key impacts to infrastructure
- Coordinate and implement a Lake County EMA COMU (Communications Unit) team consisting of Lake County EMA appointed COMLs (Communications Leader) and COMTs (Communication Technicians)

INVENTORY & DATABASE CREATION:

- Maintain a registry/database of communication professionals and their skillsets and credentials, which would be essential for emergency communications support
- Maintain a list of internal Departments who use radio and ensure there is a dedicated liaison for each Department; conduct quarterly Radio Liaison Coordination meetings
- Develop an inventory and asset tracking mechanism and provide monthly reports on current inventory and usage, outages, repairs, upcoming maintenance, and current projects and status
- Provide inventory and management of the various caches of radios used for public safety throughout Lake County
- Maintain access and utilize Communications Assets Survey and Mapping (CASM), a web-based software application that allows public safety agencies to inventory and access communications data in a consolidated tool
- Create and maintain a list of Non-Disclosure Agreements needed for LCEMA radio uses and update list annually
- Maintain and update Motorola Solutions Network Operations Center (NOC) internal County distribution list to and follow up on all site alarms

EMERGENCY RESPONSE:

- Assist in emergency support during after-hours incidents, either directly related to radio or in relationship to an EOC activation; serve in a position during an EOC activation with potential for prolonged or 24-hour operations

ADMINISTRATIVE DUTIES:

- Assist in annual budgetary projections including annual Motorola Service Agreement, and Motorola repair funds
- Serve as liaison between Motorola and Lake County department (internal) Radio Liaisons to ensure that any information regarding budgetary items including radio accessories is forwarded to liaisons
- Develop user guides for all radio equipment and applications; create policies and procedures where applicable
- Develop procedures and guidelines for radio cache usage during incidents/emergencies and exercises (ex: Damage Assessment)
- Develop procedures for utilization of Lake County Communications Unit (COMU) to include Communications Leaders (COML) and Communications Technicians (COMT) during emergency responses based on collaboration with subject matter experts and best practices
- Develop education presentation and call out procedure for public safety agencies (police and fire departments) on benefits in utilizing COMU for emergency responses based on lessons learned and best practices
- Develop quarterly meetings with Motorola representative for any training, equipment, or budget needs for LCEMA
- Assess equipment and contractual needs and provide recommendations to LCEMA leadership and County Finance
- Scope and document all equipment, assets, and licenses to ensure all radio equipment and applications are always in operational status

TECHNICAL COMPONENTS:

- Coordinate with all internal Lake County departments for all programming needs, including necessary changes and updated to firmware and routine maintenance
- Aid public safety officials when requested

TRAINING:

- Conduct regular training with Motorola and internal departments to ensure optimal use of radios
- Provide training on how radio systems operate, the infrastructure within Lake County Government, proper radio usage, and a wide variety of other topics