

**VERMONT COMMUNICATIONS (VCOMM)  
STATEWIDE INTEROPERABILITY  
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (SOPs)  
NATIONAL CALLING/NATIONAL TACTICAL CHANNELS**

**SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION**

Public safety agencies in the state of Vermont recognize the need for interagency communication, interoperability and cooperation. Vermont's law enforcement agencies, fire departments, and emergency medical services are working to establish interoperable capabilities throughout the state. Mutual aid agreements are in place, and while these plans and agreements formally extend beyond jurisdictions, they tend to remain intra-discipline in practice. In the state of Vermont, as well as in bordering states, the need for agencies to work together to establish communications interoperability and mutual aid plans is essential, not only across traditional jurisdictional boundaries, but across disciplines as well.

To remedy the lack of ability to communicate among disciplines the state of Vermont Communications (VCOMM) Board has worked with public safety agencies to develop a statewide interoperability solution. This solution establishes dedicated radio frequencies, that are part of the established licensed national calling and tactical channels (U-Call/U-Tac and V-Call/V-Tac), to be used by public safety agencies in Vermont. It is intended that these SOPs will be utilized as an overall guideline throughout Vermont.

**SECTION 2: PURPOSE**

The principal objective of the VCOMM interoperable national calling and tactical channels is to provide first responders from public safety agencies in Vermont a real-time means of communicating between responders from outside agencies, during mutual aid/auto aid incidents. The principal objective of this SOP is to outline delineation of authority, roles and procedures for responders to use when communicating on the national calling and tactical channels. This SOP will identify broad operational guidelines for using the calling and tactical channels. It shall be up to each individual agency to develop specific SOPs for their respective agency relative to operational and technical guidelines.

**SECTION 3: SCOPE**

The scope of this SOP includes all public safety agencies in Vermont including law enforcement, fire and EMS as well as out of state public safety agencies that have mutual aid and/or auto aid agreements with Vermont agencies. These agencies will work cooperatively to utilize Standard Operating Procedures during critical incidents in which more than one agency is assisting (e.g. structure fires, significant motor vehicle accidents,

hazardous materials incidents, multi casualty incidents, law enforcement incidents requiring the assistance of more than one agency) In the future, other agencies not currently included in MOUs may enter into an MOU with a town or city for use of the U-Call/U-Tac and V-Call/V-Tac channels, and will operate according to procedures outlined in this document.

#### **SECTION 4: COMMUNICATIONS STRUCTURE**

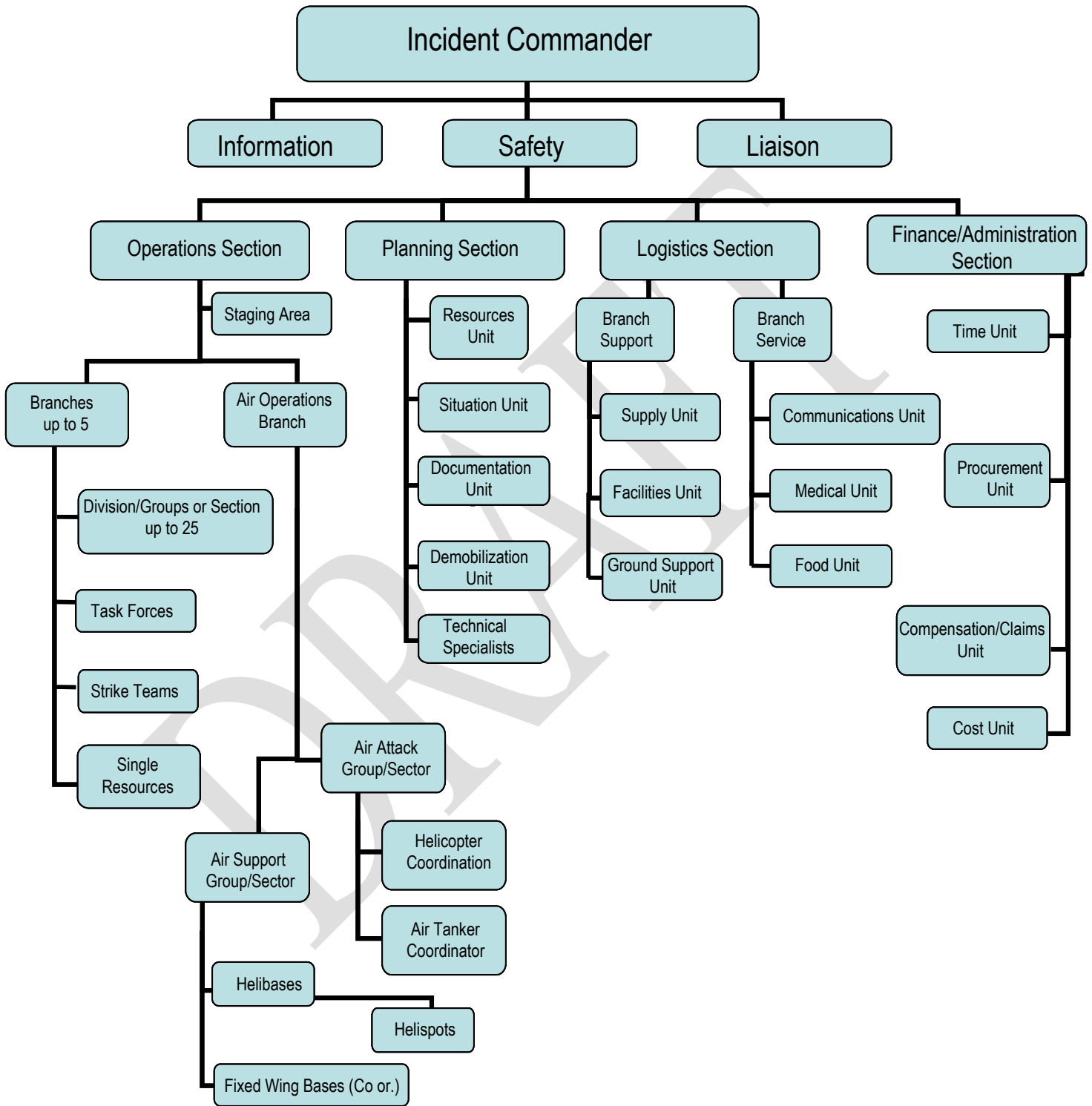
On the following page is an example of an expanded *organization chart for Incident Management at a major incident*. It includes the Communications Unit Leader (COML) position in the Logistics sections which in a large scale incident, may be assigned as resources allow. A full description of the duties and responsibilities of the Communication Unit Leader can be found in the ICS manual entitled *Communications Unit leader ICS 223-5* that was originally developed by FIRESCOPE.

A depiction of command levels and roles within agencies clarifies the relationship among users. It is imperative that all agencies use the Incident Command System (ICS) as well as the National Incident Management System (NIMS) to manage all incidents. Specifically, the ICS shall be utilized when using the national calling and tactical channels.

As recommended in ICS and NIMS, *PLAIN LANGUAGE* shall be used when communicating on the calling and tactical channels. ***It is the responsibility of the Incident Commander to determine when to use the national calling and tactical channels, however, the following criteria must be met as a minimum:***

- Multi-agency/multi-jurisdictional disasters or emergencies involving imminent danger to life and property.
- Special event control activities, generally of a pre-planned nature and generally involving joint participation of two or more public safety agencies
- Drills, exercises and training sessions.

# Incident Management – Major Incident



## **SECTION 5: DEFINITIONS, CHANNEL NAMING, RADIO PROGRAMING RECOMMENDATIONS.**

### **Definitions:**

**Communications Unit Leader (COML)** – Responsible for developing plans for the effective use of incident communications equipment and facilities; installing and testing communications equipment; supervision of the Incident Communications Center; distribution of communications equipment to incident personnel; and the maintenance and repair of communications equipment.

**Incident Command System (ICS)** – The combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure with the responsibility for the management of assigned resources to effectively accomplish stated objectives pertaining to an incident.

**Incident Commander (IC)** – the individual responsible for the management of all incident operations.

**National Incident Management System (NIMS)** - NIMS provides a consistent nationwide template to enable all government, private-sector, and non-governmental organizations to work together during domestic incidents. ICS is the national incident management model.

**Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP)** – A regional dispatch center in which 911 calls are answered. PSAPS/Dispatch centers will be capable of communications on V-CALL and U-CALL channels to provide a lifeline capability throughout the state.

**UHF** – (Ultra High Frequency) – typically the frequency that most law enforcement agencies operate on in Vermont.

**U-Call** – A UHF radio to PSAP frequency for “calling”. This channel will be used for first responders to call Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) in the event they need resources or are responding on a mutual aid situation and need to call dispatch to determine what tactical frequency the incident is utilizing. The PSAPS may use this frequency to direct responding units to an incident location or to advise what tactical channel to utilize.

**U-TAC** – A UHF radio to radio frequency for tactical use. For example, the law enforcement agency operating at a hostage situation involving more than one agency can utilize any one of the three U-TAC frequencies to communicate on. The Incident Commander may choose to move Hostage Negotiations to U-TAC 1 to lessen radio traffic on the Police Dispatch frequency).

**VHF** – (Very High Frequency) - typically the frequency that most fire departments and EMS agencies operate on in Vermont.

**V-Call** – A VHF radio to PSAP frequency for “calling”. This channel will be used for first responders to call Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) in the event they need resources or are responding on a mutual aid situation and need to call dispatch to determine what tactical frequency the incident is utilizing. The PSAPs may use this frequency to direct responding units to an incident location or to advise what tactical channel to utilize.

**V-TAC** – A VHF radio to radio frequency for tactical use. For example, the fire department operating at a structure fire involving more than one agency can utilize any one of the four V-TAC frequencies to communicate on. The Incident Commander may choose to move Water Supply Operations to V-TAC 1, and Interior fire fighters to V-Tac 2 in order to lesson the radio traffic on the main dispatch channel.

### **Channel Naming**

The Vermont nomenclature for the calling and tactical channels will differ slightly from the national nomenclature as follows:

<u>Vermont Name</u>	<u>National Name</u>
<b>V-CALL – 155.7525</b>	<b>(National name: VCALL10)</b>
<b>V-TAC 1 – 151.1375</b>	<b>(National name: VTAC11)</b>
<b>V-TAC 2 – 154.4525</b>	<b>(National name: VTAC12)</b>
<b>V-TAC 3 – 158.7375</b>	<b>(National name: VTAC13)</b>
<b>V-TAC4 – 159.4725</b>	<b>(National name: VTAC14)</b>

<b>U-CALL – 453.2125</b>	<b>(National name: UCALL40D)</b>
<b>U-TAC 1 – 453.4625</b>	<b>(National name: UTAC41D)</b>
<b>U-TAC 2 – 453.7125</b>	<b>(National name: UTAC42D)</b>
<b>U-TAC 3 - 453.8625</b>	<b>(National name: UTAC43D)</b>

(The “D” is used to designate that we are using these UHF frequencies in the simplex mode. If we were using repeater frequency pairs you would drop the “D”).

**NOTE: It is imperative to note that PSAPs cannot monitor the V-TAC or U-TAC channels. Therefore, it is essential that the IC (or their designee) monitor the main dispatch frequency to ensure that they can hear dispatch, and dispatch can communicate with the IC on scene. In large scale incidents, it would be prudent to assign a *Communication Unit Leader* to facilitate the appropriate use of channels being utilized at an incident. However, it is realistic to expect that in most instances, there will not be adequate personnel initially to assign this position. Therefore it will be the IC’s responsibility to monitor the tactical frequencies as well as the dispatch frequencies until someone can be designated to fill that role.**

### **Radio Programming Recommendations**

It is recommended that at a minimum portable and mobile radios be programmed with the V-CALL and V-TAC frequencies (VHF) or U-CALL and U-TAC frequencies (UHF), main dispatch frequencies and commonly used mutual aid frequencies. If there are not enough channels to accommodate all of the desired frequencies, then a second or third “bank” in the radio may have to be used if your radios are so equipped.

## **DHART Communications**

It is the recommendation of the VCOMM Board of Directors that V-TAC 4 is the frequency to be used as the Vermont Statewide DHART (and other air services operating in Vermont) Landing Zone (LZ) coordination frequency (159.4725 MHz with a CTCSS (PL) of 156.7.

DHART supports this recommendation, however, it is imperative that each individual agency planning to use V-TAC 4 as the DHART LZ coordination frequency, contact DHART as soon as your agencies have been reprogrammed with the VCOMM frequencies.

DHART recommends using V-TAC 4 for any air to ground operation involving NEAI aircraft, which includes the aircraft from Albany, NY and units from other New England states.

When your radio programming, to include V-TAC 4 is complete, notify Tom Perron, BS CFC, Communications Specialist with the DHART program at 603-650-4898 or by e-mail [tkp@hitchcock.org](mailto:tkp@hitchcock.org).

## **SECTION 6: ICS/NIMS, ACTIVATION/OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES/RULES OF USE**

### **Incident Command System (ICS)/National Incident Management System (NIMS)**

Each agency shall comply and support NIMS procedures, specifically ICS, and provide training to all individuals within their respective organizations. These SOPs require that ICS be used to manage all incidents when using the national calling and tactical channels, and that “*Plain language*” be used when communicating on the U-Call/V-Call or U-Tac/V-Tac frequencies. Agency heads must ensure that all applicable personnel be certified at a minimum in the following NIMS/ICS courses: NIMS IS 700 and ICS 100 and ICS 200.

### **Activation/Use:**

The U-Call/U-Tac/V-Call/V-TAC channels are only to be used for multi-agency incidents (more than one responding agency and/or discipline). Examples include; structure fires where more than one agency is dispatched (mutual aid/auto aid responses), hazardous materials incidents involving multiple agencies (police/fire), motor vehicle

crashes involving multiple agencies (State Police/Town Police), Law Enforcement incidents involving multiple agencies, etc. The U-Call/U-Tac/V-Call and V-Tac frequencies can also be used for training exercises and drills. These frequencies *shall not* be used for day to day operations involving only one agency.

### **Calling Channels (U-Call/V-Call)**

The calling channels shall be used to contact other first responding agencies or one of the eleven PSAPs throughout the state. The calling channels may also be used for setting up tactical communications for specific incidents. The 10 PSAPs and State Police Headquarters will be capable of communications on V-Call and U-Call channels to provide a lifeline capability throughout the state.

### **Tactical Channels (U-Tac/V-Tac)**

The tactical channels are to be used for coordinating activity between different agencies in a mutual aid situation. Incidents requiring multi-agency participation will be coordinated over these channels by the Incident Commander, Unified Command or the Communication Unit Leader (COML).

The IC identifying the need for interoperable communications will contact his/her respective PSAP. The IC will request that specific agencies / groups / divisions / branches / etc. switch their radios to the specific U-Tac/V-Tac frequency. The PSAP/Dispatch Center of the agency that initiates use of the interoperability channel has the responsibility to notify all other affected agencies by radio in accordance with the procedures outlined in this SOP. *Example: An IC at a structure fire may choose to move "Water Supply Operations" to one of the four V-Tac frequencies in order to lessen radio traffic on the main dispatch frequency. The IC would simply notify Dispatch that "Water Supply will be on V-Tac 2". Dispatch would then communicate that message to all units. It would then be the IC's (or his/her designee) responsibility to monitor V-Tac 2 as well as the main dispatch frequency.*

If the IC changes for the incident, the dispatch center shall be notified immediately. Once again, it is imperative that all agencies utilize the Incident Command System on all incidents. It shall be at the discretion of the IC as to when to discontinue the use of the U-Tac/V-Tac channels. The dispatch center shall be notified immediately as well, but it will be the responsibility of the IC to notify the units on scene. Units will be notified on the specific U-Tac/V-Tac channel they are on as well as the common dispatch channel that is monitored by the PSAP/Dispatch Center. If the incident involves multiple PSAPs/Dispatch Centers, the lead dispatch center will notify all participating PSAPs/Dispatch Centers that the intra-jurisdictional interoperable channel is no longer in use.

## **SECTION 7: INTEROPERABLE CHANNEL INTERFERENCE**

If units operating on the national tactical channels encounter interference while utilizing a V-Tac/U-Tac channel, simply change to a different V-Tac/U-Tac channel and notify all units accordingly. It is a possibility that some of the V-Tac/U-Tac channels may be too close to one of the current dispatch frequencies and cause interference on scene, If this situation is encountered, please notify a VCOMM representative as soon as possible so the situation can be reviewed.

## **SECTION 8: TRAINING REQUIREMENTS**

It shall be the responsibility of the head of each agency (Police Chief, Fire Chief, EMS Chief/Director, etc.) to ensure that all personnel are trained on and familiar with these SOPs. Training on the proper use of the calling and tactical channels shall be conducted at the respective Police/Fire/EMS academy for all new employees. In house training can be conducted by the agency's Communications Officer or the agency's respective Radio Vendor. A U-Call/V-Call User's Guide is located in Attachment A.

### **Minimum Training Requirements include:**

- NIMS/ICS IS 700 and ICS 100 and 200.
- Where the national calling and tactical channels are programmed into the portable and mobile radios of the agency and how to access them.
- When and when not to use the V-Tac/U-Tac channels (only on mutual aid/auto aid/multi-agency drills/exercise).
- How to switch from one tactical channel to the next.
- If different 'banks' are used in the portable radio, individuals must be properly trained in moving from one 'bank' to another.
- Proper terminology and radio etiquette, as well as the use of *plain language* for all communications involving the use of the national and tactical channels.
- Who to notify in their respective agency if they have a radio problem.
- How to access the U-Call/V-Call channels for communication with PSAPs/Dispatch Centers.
- How to communicate with intrastate agencies (New Hampshire, New York).
- Individuals must understand that PSAPs/Dispatch Centers cannot monitor the V-Tac/U-Tac channels.
- All agencies must ensure that they have established a specific SOP regarding communications within their respective agencies, and that all personnel are familiar with it.

## **SECTION 10: TESTING REQUIREMENTS**

### **Communication Center Testing**

- Each agency shall be responsible for a weekly test of the intra-jurisdictional channels between the public safety agency and the PSAP/Dispatch Center.

### **Operational Testing**

- Each agency will decide when testing should take place. All agency heads or designated representatives with radios pre-set with the national tactical channels will participate in this testing. Each individual portable radio and each vehicle equipped with a mobile radio shall be tested to ensure all U-Tac/V-Tac channels are operating effectively. U-Call/V-call channels shall be tested periodically during multi-agency drills/exercises through the PSAPs. This testing shall be done monthly, or as determined by the PSAP agency head.

## **SECTION 11: RESPONSIBILITY**

It shall be the responsibility of the agency head to ensure that these SOPs are followed when applicable. It shall be the responsibility of all communications personnel/first responders/firefighters/police officers/EMS personnel, etc., to be familiar with and comply with these SOPs.

## **CONCLUSION**

Interoperable communications are imperative for effective incident operations and the safety of personnel operating on scene. Although these SOPs are a *broad overview* of the national calling and tactical channel procedures for Vermont, they are not designed to take the place of an agency's specific SOPs regarding operations at an incident when the national calling and tactical channels are not being utilized. As previously stated, the national calling and tactical channels were not designed for day to day use in incidents only involving one agency. They were designed to be used in multi-agency incidents in which interoperability is essential for communicating between agencies or between functional groups or divisions.

Attachment A

<b>VCOMM</b>	<h2 style="margin: 0;">Vermont Communications</h2> <h3 style="margin: 0;">U-Call/V-Call (U-Tac/V-Tac) User's Guide</h3>
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Phone: (802) 334-6733  
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 Email: [jduquett@dps.state.vt.us](mailto:jduquett@dps.state.vt.us)

**VCOMM Web Site**  
[www.dps.state.vt.us/vcomm](http://www.dps.state.vt.us/vcomm)

<u>Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>CTCSS</u>	<u>Description</u>
U-Call	453.2125	156.7	National Calling
U-Tac 1	453.4625	156.7	UHF Tactical
U-Tac 2	453.7125	156.7	UHF Tactical
U-Tac 3	453.8625	156.7	UHF Tactical
V-Call	155.7525	156.7	National Calling
V-Tac 1	151.1375	156.7	VHF Tactical
V-Tac 2	154.4525	156.7	VHF Tactical
V-Tac 3	158.7375	156.7	VHF Tactical
V-Tac 4	159.4725	156.7	VHF Tactical



**Who** determines when to use U-Call/V-Call and U-Tac/V-Tac?

An Incident Commander or Unified Command determines whether or not to use these channels and which ones will be used.

**What** are U-Call/V-Call and U-Tac/V-Tac?

U-Call and V-Call are shared national calling channels and U-Tac and V-Tac are shared national tactical channels. These channels are for **multi-agency** responses similar to Fire Ground and Mutual Aid channels. The U-Tac/V-Tac frequencies will allow interoperability between all agencies who have these frequencies in their radios. The U-Call/V-Call frequencies will allow direct communication with a PSAP while responding to any region in Vermont.

**When** can these frequencies be used?

During any **multi-agency** response. Note: The PSAPs will not have the ability to monitor the U-Tac/V-Tac frequencies.

**Where** can I use these frequencies?

Anywhere in the State of Vermont. In the future you will be able to use these frequencies in our neighboring States & Provinces for interoperability or for “lifeline” requests.

**Why** would I want to use these?

They will alleviate the congestion often encountered at an incident by having multiple channels available for use.

*Note: When the Incident Commander, Unified Command or Communications Officer decides to communicate on these frequencies, the area PSAP should be notified that the U-Tac/V-Tac frequencies are being utilized.*