



How to Build a Communications Response when the World is Burning

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Presenters

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Abstract

On August 23rd, 2020, there was an officer-involved shooting in Kenosha, WI. What started as a local law enforcement incident was followed in the days after by protests, which included rallies, marches, property damage, arson, and clashes with police. During the incident, two protesters were fatally shot in a confrontation with an armed civilian. Ultimately, law enforcement from across the state provided mutual aid to Kenosha, and the State of Wisconsin deployed nearly 1,000 National Guard troops, including out of state units. This event occurred during an election cycle, which brought an added complexity due to the presence of POTUS and then-Candidate Biden.

This presentation will focus on the initial response, how the Wisconsin COMU supported local needs, and how this incident fundamentally changed how we operate.

Note: This presentation will focus solely on the actions of the COMU, and not on any law enforcement actions.



Who Are We?

- Jim Westover
 - WI-recognized COML/COMT
 - Initial COML on-scene during the Kenosha Civil Unrest
- Margaret Zieke
 - WI-recognized COML/COMT
 - Served as COMT trainee during the Kenosha Civil Unrest



Initial Event – August 23rd



1710 hours:

The City of Kenosha Police Department responded to a "Family Trouble" call.

Officers attempt to detain a suspect, who also has an active felony warrant, after attempting to leave scene with one or more of his children in a car that doesn't belong to him.

After a struggle and the suspect entering a vehicle, an officer discharges his weapon striking the subject.

Two civilians in the area film part of this event as it unfolds.

Source: <https://www.kenoshacounty.org/DocumentCenter/View/11827/Report-on-the-Officer-Involved-Shooting-of-Jacob-Blake>

Photo credit: Reuters





Night – August 23rd



1900 hours: Protests had started in Kenosha after the shooting. Protesters were agitated and causing property damage. Activity was focused downtown near the courthouse and Public Safety Building (PSB).

2200 hours: The City of Kenosha requested SMART Level 3 response via Kenosha County Sheriff. This would bring in 14 external agencies across 3 other counties...all with disparate radio systems. The WSP SMART COML was closest and assigned.

2223 hours: COML called the incident commander and asked if they needed comms support. The answer was "We're okay" but he did not seem prepared for the influx of mutual aid agencies.

2230 hours: COML was notified KESO went up to a SMART Level 7 plus asked for an additional 100 Mobile Field Force (MFF) officers.

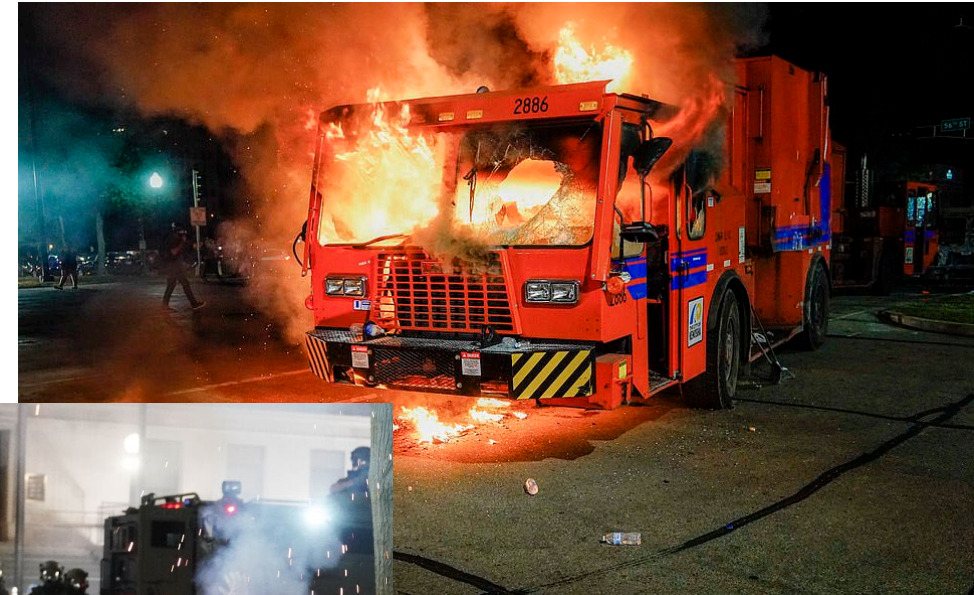


Photo credit (top): EPA

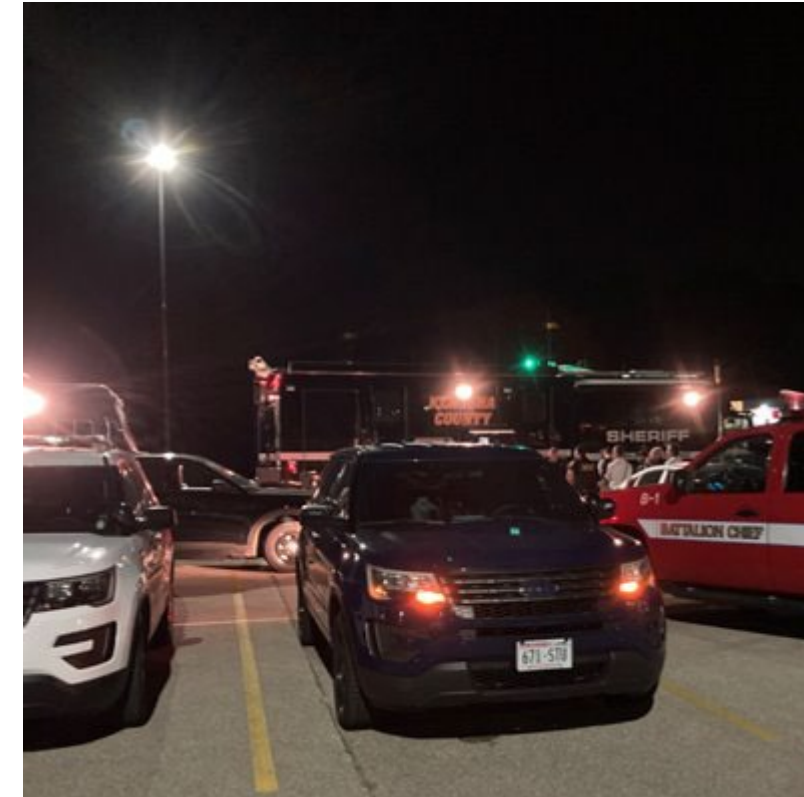
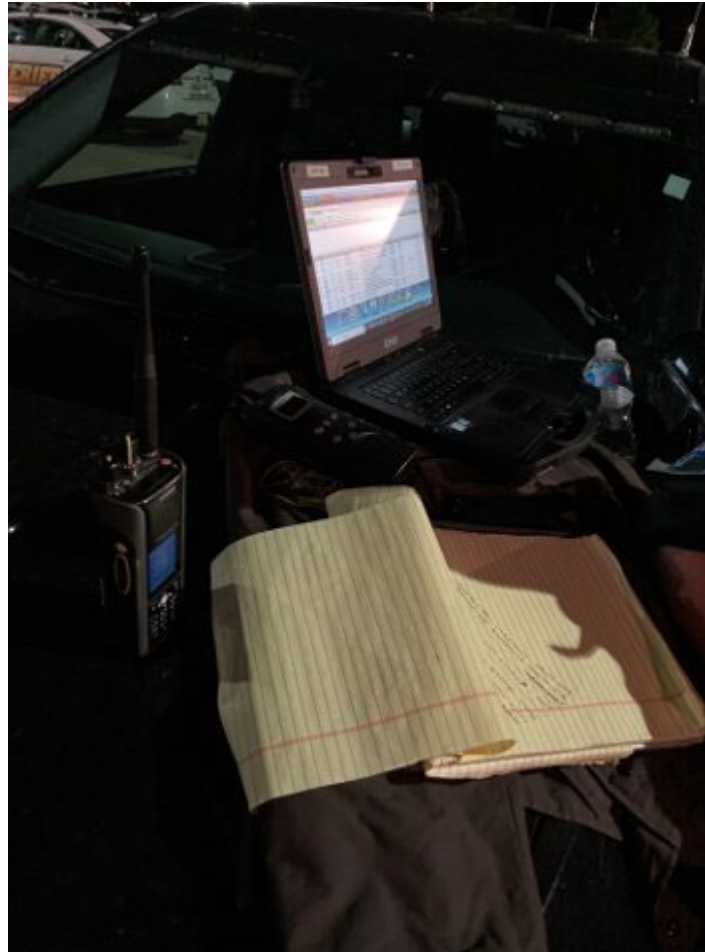
Photo credit (left): LA Times



Night – August 23rd



- With the initial SMART request, a member of the State COMU was luckily on scene at staging, as the Staging Officer
- Staging was already trying to sort out VHF vs 800 users
- **2252 hours:** COML and Staging Officer chose MARC1 and 8TAC92D as initial channels
- **2253 hours:** A TTY was sent to SMART agencies with channel information
- **2257 hours:** SMART COML was requested to staging with an 8TAC92 repeater to be deployed in the hot zone.
- **0029 hours:** WSP COML arrived with equipment to staging.
- Upon talking to IC and Tactical boss, we had to wait until after 0200 to get into the PSB to deploy.

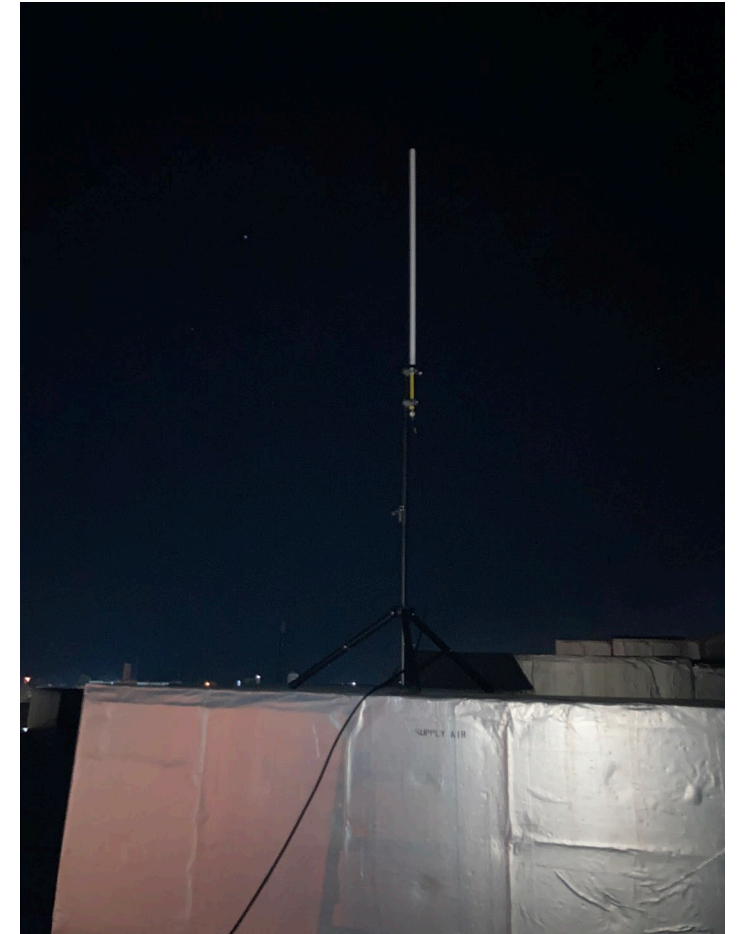




Hot Zone Deployment



- **0200 hours:** In order to accommodate the out-of-area departments, the 8TAC92 repeater was deployed on the roof of the Public Safety Building for the night.
- **Good news:**
 - It was in a good spot for coverage
- **Bad News:**
 - Bad news: It was the riot epicenter
- COML and a deputy gained access after the crowd was distracted away from the garage doors





Day 2 – August 24th

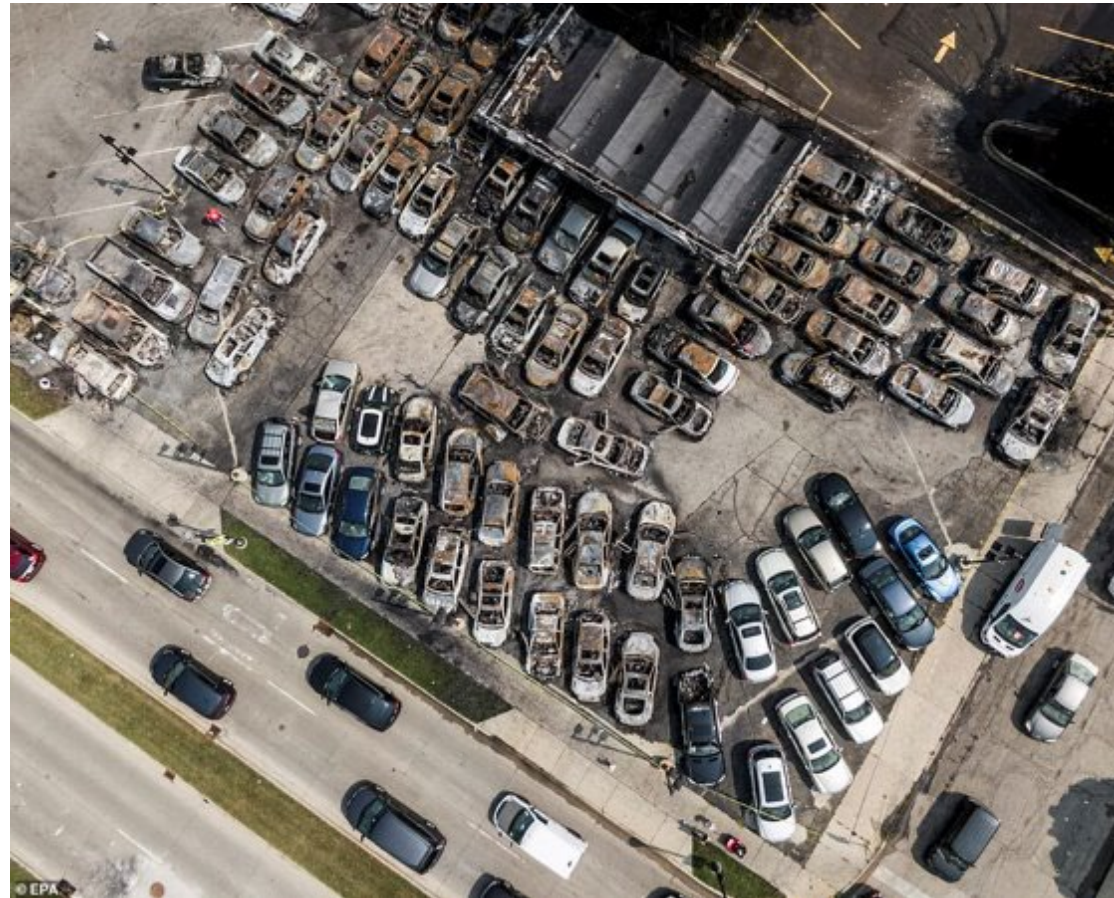


Photo credit: EPA



Position of Advantage



- The next day, we positioned several interoperability repeaters on the roof of a hospital in downtown Kenosha.
- Hospital management was happy to accommodate us, and the equipment stayed until 2021 because of Rittenhouse





Extended Operations



- As the incident escalated and persisted, COMU requested additional COML/COMT support for extended operations
- Request went through the SEOC
 - Uncommon request, and there was not an easily available state resource
 - COMLs, COMTs, and trainees from state and local levels were brought in to support the incident



Additional Factors



- "Professional" protesters actively using cheap ChiCom radios to monitor and/or jam analog comms; coordinate activities
 - Particularly bad in Chicago due to analog UHF system
- WI National Guard activation added layer of complexity to comms planning
- Out of State National Guard assets further complicated getting everyone on same page
 - Tip: Get to know your NG comms folks before the incident



Additional Factors



- POTUS/DV visits
 - Additional security and coordination needs
 - Location vs radio coverage vs encryption needs
 - Borrowed STARCOM21 radios via interstate MABAS request
 - Get USSS TSD contact

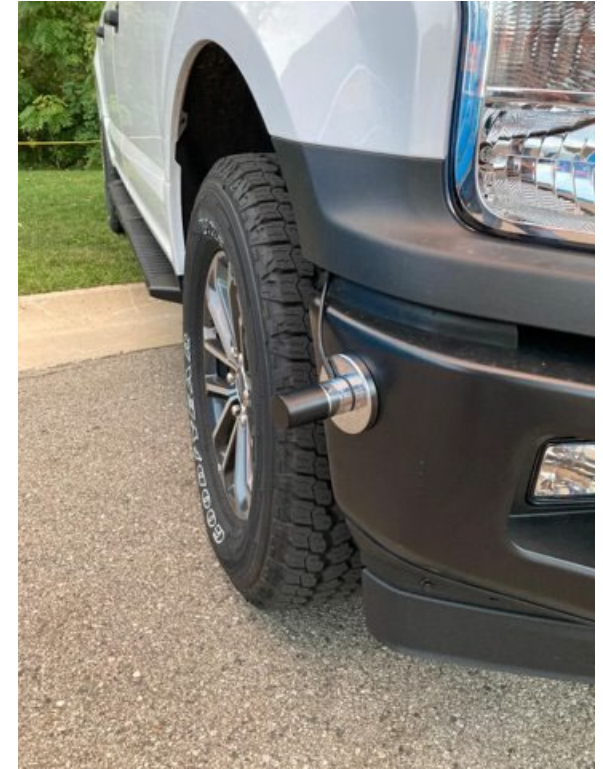




Additional Factors



- Field upfitting
 - As part of the POTUS visit, the Tactical commander asked the COMU if we could get radios working inside four new F150 trucks
 - IL-MABAS cutting board mobiles and antennas on encrypted SC21 TG's were used





Additional Factors



- National Guard comms assets needed work in the field for them to be successful
 - VHF repeater improperly installed by vendor
 - Antenna issues





Additional Factors



- CP Locations
 - Most of the incident involved local, state and fed assets
 - There was an Incident CP, Tactical CP and Fire CP
 - Tactical CP was outside most of the event and needed comms





Issues



- CP Locations
 - Inside, outside, MCP, etc.
- Radio programming
 - Same name, different channel information
- COMU staffing long-term
- Interop Radio Equipment
 - Hot zone coverage vs. safe location
 - "Need" vs. "Want"



After-Action Review

WI OEC received a CISA TA to conduct an after-action-review (AAR) focused on the COMU response

Response to the COMU's actions was overall positive, although there were suggestions for improvement





Primary Findings/Actions

- Identify the possibility of creating a statewide notification system that local agencies can use to ensure that communications personnel are activated early in all incidents and events.
 - *Action 1: Communications Coordination Call (with Wisconsin Emergency Mgmt.)*
 - *Action 2: Creation of Communications Asset Team*



Findings, Cont.

- Ensure that radios are programmed correctly with all compatible state and federal interoperability channels
 - *Action 1: Education and Outreach (including ICS awareness)*
 - *Action 2: Inclusion of COMU best practices in WI-FOG update*



Aiming for Success

- Successful operations typically contain the following:
 - Strong Command Emphasis
 - Training on Equipment and Plans
 - Knowledge of Mutual Aid
 - Understanding the utility of the COMU

Utilize these to make your agency more resilient!



Know What is in Your Radio

- Interoperability Channel Programming
 - NIFOG/WIFOG channels are necessary for mutual aid communications
 - Ensure these channels are programmed correctly into department radios & that staff is aware of their presence
- Radio Training
 - General Knowledge & Understanding



Know Your Equipment



- Know what you have and what you can bring to the party (with correct programming!)
 - Radios with NIFOG/MIFOG programming
 - Interoperability LMR repeaters
 - Local repeater installations--consider partnering with mutual aid partners
 - Make sure that someone knows how to access and operate the repeater (even remotely)
 - Understand what other repeaters are in the area to avoid problems (this may require interstate communication!)



Asking for Help

Leave your ego at the door and consider the following:

- Local Resources
- State Resources
- Out-of-State & Federal Resources



Know who has what assets and have them on speed dial!



In Closing

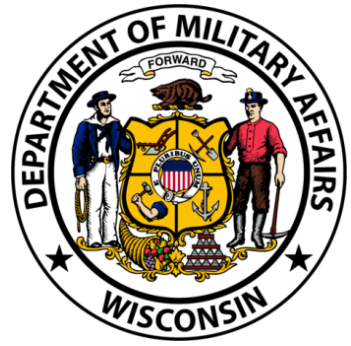


Parting Tips for Success

1. Command Emphasis
2. Know what is in your radio
3. Know your equipment
4. Know how to ask for help
5. Prepare now
to avoid surprises later
6. "It won't happen
here" doesn't exist
7. Hope is not a plan



Questions?





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