



Getting Started Checklist

MABAS – Michigan

MABAS-Michigan (MABAS-MI), the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System-Michigan, is a user driven system designed to streamline requesting and providing emergency service resources across the State and Great Lakes Region. MABAS originated in the Chicago area in the late 1960's as local fire departments recognized the need for a system oriented process to request and provide mutual aid. In Illinois, MABAS has grown to over 60 divisions representing over 1100 fire departments. MABAS is also operational in Wisconsin, Indiana, and in portions of other Midwest states.

While MABAS-MI does not alter or replace local mutual aid agreements, it provides the framework for intrastate and interstate mutual aid, as well as for day to day assistance. Mutual aid agreements should be periodically reviewed and updated. To avoid duplication of effort, adoption of MABAS-MI offers the fire service an opportunity to streamline its number of mutual aid agreements.

In order to begin the process, MABAS-MI has identified the following steps:

◆ Establish a Working Group

The basic building block of MABAS is the *division*. A division may be the fire departments in a portion of a county, the entire county, or several counties. Organizing all of the departments in a current mutual aid group is a logical starting point for a division since these departments have previously agreed to work together. If a division is formed in a geographic area and not all of the fire departments within that area elect to join, the MABAS-MI Executive Board will typically not allow another division to be formed in that same geographic area unless the population is great enough that two divisions are warranted. Many MABAS divisions have formed from existing county fire chiefs or mutual aid groups; however, this is not a mandatory requirement. Counties that share borders and have reduced population density may join together to form a single division, while a county with a larger population or larger geographical area may choose to develop more than one division.

It is recommended that existing organizations form steering committees or workgroups to address these major steps. If the interest exists, this committee will provide the management and support that will be necessary for completing the process. The steering committee will prove to be a valuable asset for the member agencies, and will directly impact the amount of time the implementation process will take.

◆ **Contact MABAS-MI**

When members of the prospective division decide to pursue joining MABAS-MI, the journey begins by contacting MABAS-MI by e-mail to advise the state organization of the interest in forming a division. The MABAS-MI Executive Board will provide an overview of the process and discuss the resources available including: the MABAS-MI orientation presentation, speakers who will attend meetings to explain the program and the process and assistance with box alarm card development. Visit the MABAS-MI website www.mabasmi.org and use the “Contact MABAS” link to communicate with the MABAS-MI Executive Board officers. You may also request to have your email address placed on the MABAS-MI email group. You will then be provided with periodic updates regarding MABAS-MI activities.

◆ **Communications**

Invariably, interoperable communications becomes the most discussed and misunderstood step in the planning and implementing process. Much has been written about interoperability, P25 compliance, narrow-banding and the confusion created by Federal grant guidance and requirements.

In other states, all MABAS radio communications occur on simplex, VHF (150-160 MHz) high band frequencies. In these states, MABAS radio communications occur on 2 separate, but necessary levels. The first level is dispatching - the primary dispatch radio frequency on IFERN (Interagency Fire Emergency Radio Network). Dispatch communications include alerting of member agencies, communications with resources reporting their responding and in-staging status, and where initial assignments are given by the incident commander. The second level of communication is at the incident operations level (typically on MABAS Red, White and Blue fire ground simplex frequencies) where all tactical/incident level communications occur. Only the incident commander communicates on both of these communication levels.

In Michigan, MABAS-MI has licensed the eight MABAS VHF mutual frequencies for statewide use. While these frequencies are licensed statewide in Michigan, there are several challenges to the traditional MABAS communications architecture:

- Several of the standardized MABAS mutual aid radio frequencies are being utilized for dispatch and other fire service uses.
- The proximity of Canada to the State of Michigan imposes some restrictions on the use of the mutual aid frequencies in border regions of the state.
- Many fire departments have migrated to UHF and 800 MHz radio systems functionally abandoning the VHF spectrum for fire operations.

To address these issues, MABAS-MI has implemented the following policies:

- MABAS-MI divisions may utilize their existing communications infrastructure to accomplish their primary intradivisional dispatching and tactical communication requirements.
- Each division must address interdivisional dispatching and tactical radio communications with their neighboring divisions and must also develop a plan to address these levels of communications.
- It is MABAS-MI's policy that any regional, multi-regional, intrastate, or interstate deployment of MABAS-MI resources be equipped with the MABAS standard VHF mutual aid radio communications capability. This may be accomplished by each department maintaining a cache of VHF mobile and portable radios that may be deployed with responding units.

In addition to the radio spectrum issues, each division will need to designate primary and back up dispatch centers for MABAS-MI dispatching. If there is only one dispatch center for the entire area, then consider the neighboring MABAS-MI division or county dispatch center as the backup. Each dispatch center must also have common communications capabilities with the fire departments within their division.

◆ **MABAS Adoption by Local Governments**

The MABAS-MI Agreement is an intergovernmental agreement and must:

- Be approved by a resolution of the governing body of each participating government agency.
- Be signed by the appropriate elected official from each participating government agency.
- Be filed with the Clerk's Office in the County of the participating jurisdiction.

- Be filed with the Michigan Secretary of State prior to its effective date (the MABAS Executive Board can aid in this State filing)

MABAS-MI has provided sample resolutions to assist in developing the resolution. The sample resolutions can be found on the website. A copy of the signed resolution for each member department of the division must be included in the application package.

◆ **MABAS-MI Agreement**

The Agreement provides the legal parameters for intrastate and interstate mutual aid such as the liability, Worker's Compensation and indemnification language that is required of interlocal agreements.

The Agreement wording and provisions cannot be changed and is only available in an Adobe format, with exception of the signature page. The signature page can be changed to fit the format needs of the local municipality. The completed division Agreement must be Included in the application package. Visit the MAFC website, in the MABAS Section for the Agreement and the signature page. Contact the MABAS-MI Executive Board for any assistance with the agreement.

◆ **MEMAC Agreement (No Longer a Requirement)**

The MABAS Executive Board at their May 2013 meeting, voted to eliminate the requirement for departments to sign the MEMAC agreement as a condition to join MABAS. The MEMAC agreement provides for reimbursement if a department responds pursuant to a governor's declaration of disaster. In addition, MEMAC is the vehicle that permits local resources to be deployed interstate via an Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) request. All MABAS member departments are strongly encouraged to sign the MEMAC agreement; however it is no longer a requirement to join MABAS.

◆ **Application for Division Status**

When the prospective division is ready, it must submit a complete application package to the MABAS-MI Executive Committee. The application package MUST contain all of the documents listed below:

1. Letter of Intent: A letter of intent requesting recognition as a MABAS-MI division which includes a description of the geographic area to be included in the division.

2. By-Laws: A draft copy of your divisional by-laws.
3. Member Department Contact Information: A list identifying each member department, department address, mailing address (if different), contact person, telephone number, fax number, and email address.
4. Dispatch Centers: A confirmation letter from your dispatch center(s), identifying the division's primary and backup dispatch centers, contact person, telephone and fax number, and email address for each center.
5. Division Officers: A list of the division officers, their title/position, their department name, address, mailing address (if different), telephone number, fax number, and email address.
6. Division Representative: A Division Representative that will serve on the MABAS Executive board shall be identified. Also provide contact information for this individual. A Proxy form shall be completed to designate an alternate representative that may vote in the absence of the designated Division Representative.
7. Plan Coordinator: A Plan Coordinator shall be identified, and contact information provided for this individual.
8. Agreements: Copies (scanned/disk or hard copy) of each of the following shall be submitted:
 - A. A copy of each member department's signed resolution from the governing body adopting the MABAS Agreement.
 - B. A copy of each member department's signed MABAS Agreement; only the first page and the signature page are required to be submitted.

The Executive Board will review the division application and if complete, will approve the application and assign the division number. The new division is responsible for selecting one of their member fire chiefs to be a voting member of the MABAS-MI Executive Board (Division Representative).

◆ **General Operating Procedures**

MABAS is based on cooperation and standardization between participating departments. To accomplish this standardized system, MABAS-MI has developed a *Field Operating Guide* (FOG). The FOG describes the procedures that have been adopted by MABAS-MI and are a starting point for the division to address response in the local area as it relates to a MABAS response.

The MABAS-MI system allows for minor changes in the procedures when operating internally within your division. When deploying between divisions, however, the MABAS-MI procedures must be followed. For example, division members may have agreed that staffing levels for engine and truck response of three personnel is acceptable for an intra-division response. If, however, there is an interdivisional response, the staffing levels of engines and trucks must staff four personnel. Much of the document contains “boiler plate” operational procedures in the MABAS system in the state but some of the procedures will not pertain to every division.

MABAS-MI has other policies, procedures, and guidelines, available on the website, including standardization of accountability, communications, system administration, standardization of organization, special operational needs and mission support structures. All official documents of MABAS-MI are approved by the Executive Board, which is comprised of the representatives of each division. Any changes in the General Operating Procedures by the division must be submitted to the MABAS-MI Secretary/Treasurer for approval by MABAS-MI Executive Board at a regular business meeting. Each approved division has representation (one member) on the Executive Board.

◆ **Box Alarm Card Development**

Each division member will need to develop box alarm cards; the box alarm cards identify the required MABAS-MI resources that are necessary for a given emergency event in a given response area. Box cards simplify the ordering and dispatching of resources. There are numerous box alarm card types, however individual members must evaluate their response area risks and identify the box alarm cards that address that risk. Contact MABAS-MI Executive Board for questions and assistance with box alarm card development.

Developing box cards presents an opportunity to appreciate the value of MABAS. Box card meetings provide local emergency responders a chance to inventory available resources in their area, address specific response risks, and serve as networking sessions to discuss common challenges. Mutual aid was based on neighbor helping neighbor and these meetings serve to build a bridge and alleviate the reluctance to ask for mutual aid.

◆ **Training**

Your fire, special rescue, and emergency medical personnel, as well as your dispatching personnel will require training on MABAS-MI policies and procedures. The steering committee will be the key to success of MABAS-MI implementation and therefore it is strongly suggested to have at least one training officer be part of the steering committee. MABAS-MI can provide training to your division or assist your training officer in the process. Contact the MABAS-MI Executive Board to schedule a training session in your area.

◆ **Set “Go Live” Date**

If box cards are completed early in the process, departments may begin calling each other by phone for assistance using the alarm levels established in the box cards. Depending on the number and complexity of the issues encountered, there will be a point that the new division members will decide to go live. It is a good idea to have the steering committee/workgroup monitor the start up process and provide feedback to the division members. Based on past experiences, the process used while becoming a functioning member of the largest mutual aid system in the country will be a very exciting time. Good luck and please do not hesitate to ask for help!

Application Package Checklist

- _____ Letter of Intent
- _____ Draft Bylaws
- _____ Member Department Contact Information
- _____ Dispatch confirmation letter(s)
- _____ List of Division Officers
- _____ Named Division Representative
- _____ Named Plan Coordinator
- _____ Copy of each division member’s signed Agreement
- _____ Copy of each division member’s signed Resolution
- _____ Copy of the Proxy Voting Form