COMPANION GUIDE TO ONLINE TRAINING

Use alongside the online lessons at fortunefavorsthepreparated.com/com-05-landing/

COM-05
ICS-205 COMMUNICATIONS PLAN
STUDENT COMPANION GUIDE

Producing a field-usable communications plan your group can hand to anybody

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A reference companion to the five-lesson online course on the NIMS/ICS Incident Radio Communications Plan.
Five lesson chapters | Seven blank worksheets | Glossary and quick-reference card

Edition v1.0 | 2026

Semper Paratus, Semper Gumby

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COM-05 ICS-205 Communications Plan

Companion Guide to Online Training

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This guide is not a standalone course.

It contains reference tables and blank worksheets only. The instruction, the worked examples, and the knowledge checks live in the online lessons. Support the development and availability of these courses by subscribing to my Patreon. Work each lesson online first, then use the matching chapter here as the thing you keep.

ONLINE TRAINING ACCESS

The five COM-05 lessons, the course map, and the certificate are at fortunefavorstheprepared.com/com-05-landing/. Lessons unlock in order as each one's knowledge checks are answered correctly.

INSTRUCTOR-LED GROUP TRAINING

COM-05 works well as a group session. One member works the lessons online, then runs the group through Part II's worksheets in a single sitting. The capstone in Chapter 5 is designed to be completed by the group together rather than by one person alone.

How to Use This Companion Guide

Requires the online course.

Every chapter here opens with a line naming the lesson it supports, and assumes you have already completed that lesson online. Nothing in this guide teaches the material.

What this guide contains

Part	What is in it
Part I — Quick Reference	One chapter per online lesson. Condensed tables and rules, no instruction.
Part II — Worksheets	Seven blank, fillable worksheets: inventory, nets, the channel table, the header blocks, coverage, review log, and the capstone checklist.
Part III — Appendix	Glossary, a one-page quick-reference card, doctrinal sources with links, and open items.

Required workflow

Order matters.

1. Complete the online lesson, including its knowledge checks.
2. Read the matching chapter here to consolidate what the lesson covered.
3. Fill the matching worksheet in Part II with your group's real data.
4. Do not fill the worksheets from memory or from this guide alone. The worksheets assume decisions the lessons walk you through.

This guide is not standalone.

A group that works only from these worksheets will produce a plan that looks complete and fails the cold read in Chapter 5. The reasoning behind each column is in the lessons, not here.

Guide Map — What to Reference When

When you need…	Turn to…
To know what the form is for and who reads it	Chapter 1
To fill in a specific block or column	Chapter 2, block and column tables
To check a repeater row is the right way round	Chapter 2, the read-aloud test
To know which service a household may transmit on	Chapter 3, service comparison table
To build your spectrum catalog	Chapter 3, and Worksheet 1
To check a plan before handing it over	Chapter 4, plan-killer table
To know what invalidates the plan you have	Chapter 5, revision trigger table
To run the capstone with your group	Worksheet 7
A term you do not recognize	Appendix A, Glossary
One page to carry	Appendix B, Quick Reference Card

PART I — QUICK REFERENCE

Chapter 1 — Why the ICS-205 Matters for a MAG

Reference for Lesson 1.

What the form is

A standard NIMS/ICS form listing every radio channel in use for one operational period, who is on each, and how to set a radio to reach them. Prepared by the Communications Unit Leader, distributed as part of the Incident Action Plan.

The three readers

Reader	What they need from it
Your own members	Frequency, tone and channel name — enough to program a radio and carry it.
Responding agencies	Function, Assignment and Remarks — what nets exist and whether any of it touches their spectrum.
The next shift, and next year	A record of what was actually run, so the same coverage gap is not rediscovered.

The ICS form family

Form	Carries	Relationship
ICS 202	Incident objectives	The 205 is distributed attached to it
ICS 203	Who fills which ICS position	Governs what may appear in Assignment
ICS 204	What a division or group is doing	Frequency assignments are copied onto it
ICS 205	Channels, frequencies, assignments	This course
ICS 205A	People and how to reach them	Contact roster — a different form
ICS 206	Medical support and evacuation	Often carries the medical net entry
ICS 217A	Spectrum inventory for the area	The input to the 205

The 217 and the 205

ICS 217A — the catalog	ICS 205 — the plan
Everything available in your area of operations	The handful of channels actually in use
Built once, maintained on a schedule	Produced per operational period
Long by design; nobody carries it	Short enough to read in ten seconds; carried and handed over
No assignments	Assignment column names who is on each channel

The workflow this buys you.

Because both forms share a column layout, building the plan is a copy and paste out of the catalog rather than authoring from a blank page under time pressure.

Chapter 2 — Anatomy of the Form

Reference for Lesson 2.

Header blocks

Block	Title	What goes in it
1	Incident Name	The event, not your group name.
2	Date/Time Prepared	When the sheet was written. 24-hour clock.
3	Operational Period	Start and end date/time this plan is true for.
5	Special Instructions	Cross-band repeat, secure voice, encoders, tones, coverage limits, contact.
6	Prepared by	Name, signature, date/time. Never leave blank.

Block 4 columns

Column	What it holds
Zone / Ch #	Programmed channel position, or a reference line number. Pick one meaning.
Function	Command, Tactical, Ground-to-Air, Air-to-Air, Support, Dispatch. Standard words only.
Channel Name	Standard nomenclature where one exists; otherwise a descriptive name for your net.
Assignment	Who is actually on this channel.
RX Freq (N or W)	What the handheld receives on. Four decimal places, plus bandwidth letter.
RX Tone/NAC	Tone the handheld must hear to open squelch. In hertz.
TX Freq (N or W)	What the handheld transmits on. Four decimal places, plus bandwidth letter.
TX Tone/NAC	Tone the handheld sends. In hertz.
Mode	A analog, D digital, M mixed.
Remarks	Repeater site, coverage limits, fallback relationship, licensing, monitor-only status.

The subscriber-perspective rule.

The form is filled out from the point of view of the person holding the radio, never the repeater. RX is the repeater output. TX is the repeater input.

The read-aloud test: say the row as an instruction to a person — receive on X, transmit on Y, sending tone Z. If that is a correct instruction to somebody holding a handheld, the row is right.

Formatting conventions

Convention	Rule
Decimal places	Always four. 146.5200, not 146.52.
Bandwidth	The form names N and W. The field convention adds U for ultranarrow.
Tones	The value in hertz, 67.0 to 254.1. Never a radio’s menu index.
Simplex	RX and TX frequency identical. Writing it twice is correct.
Mode	One letter.

A tone is not privacy.

It controls when your own speaker opens. It does nothing to stop anyone else hearing you. Correct this in your group before it costs you something.

Where the standard columns run out.

A DMR channel needs a talkgroup, a time slot and a color code, and the form has a column for none of the three. Put them in Remarks in a fixed order, or add columns to the right of the standard ten on your spreadsheet master.

Chapter 3 — Populating Your MAG's Channels

Reference for Lesson 3.

What each service permits

Service	License	Covers	Power	Ext. antenna	Repeaters
FRS	None	Anyone	2 W (0.5 W ch 8–14)	No	No
MURS	Licensed by rule	Anyone	2 W	Yes, within height limits	Prohibited
GMRS	Individual, $35 / 10 yr	Licensee and immediate family	Up to 50 W	Yes	Yes, 8 pairs
Amateur	Individual, by exam	The licensed operator only	Band and class dependent	Yes	Yes

The GMRS trap.

A GMRS license covers the licensee and immediate family. It does not cover a group. The FCC will not license an organization. Six unrelated households need six licenses.

Second constraint: a GMRS transmitter must be certified for Part 95E, and a radio that also operates on amateur frequencies cannot hold that certification.

Net functions

Function	Who is on it	Traffic
Command	Anyone who makes or receives a decision	Low volume, high value. Keep it clear.
Tactical	People doing the work — perimeter, transport, search	High volume. Needs net discipline.
Support / Logistics	Supply, water, fuel, medical resupply	Often the first net dropped when thin.
Monitor only	Everyone, receive only	Weather, alerting, interoperability calling channels.

Checking the national channels locally.

Some jurisdictions run the national interoperability channels for daily operations, and many use a local name rather than the national one. Check every one against local sources before it reaches a plan.

Where your state publishes its own field operations guide, that is the best source, because it is what the agencies around you are working from.

Listed is not licensed.

A channel appearing in a national reference is not permission to transmit on it. The published worksheets carry a license-required note on most entries and an additional MOU requirement on the federal channels.

Chapter 4 — Coordinating with Responding Agencies

Reference for Lesson 4.

What a reader checks in ten seconds

They look for	Where
Who you are	Block 1 and Block 6 — an incident name and a human with a phone number
How many nets	Row count. Four reads organized. Fourteen reads unusable.
Whether it touches them	Frequency column, and Remarks for patch, gateway or monitor
Whether it is consistent	Four decimals, bandwidth letter, tones in hertz, real function words

The mistakes that kill a plan

Mistake	Why it kills the plan
Three decimal places	Ambiguous under modern channel spacing
No bandwidth letter	Reader cannot program correctly below 512 MHz
Tones as menu indices	Not portable to any other radio
RX/TX from the repeater’s point of view	A radio programmed from the sheet will not work
Talkgroup names in a frequency column	Shows a misunderstanding of what a talkgroup is
Invented function words	Reader cannot place the net in the ICS structure
Channels you are not licensed for	Turns a helpful document into evidence
No operational period	Accuracy is unknowable
Fourteen rows	Nobody reads fourteen rows
Nothing in Block 6	No one to call when a line does not work
Illegible handwriting	Unreadable by the third photocopy

The interoperability continuum

Five lanes, only one of which is radios: Governance, Standard Operating Procedures, Technology, Training and Exercises, Usage. A group with modest radios and the other four is more useful than a group with excellent radios and none of them.

A MAG never creates a patch.

Declare gateway capability in Block 5. The Communications Unit Leader decides whether a patch happens, because only they can see what else is patched and what would break.

The recognized path in.

Auxiliary communications is the framework through which volunteer communicators join an incident structure; the auxiliary communicator reports to the Incident Communications Center Manager or the Communications Unit Leader, usually as a technical specialist.

ARES and RACES are organizations, not ICS positions. Credentialing happens before an incident, through your emergency manager, on an ordinary weekday.

Chapter 5 — Maintaining and Updating the Plan

Reference for Lesson 5.

Two-tier structure

Standing plan	Incident plan
Your baseline. Blocks 1 and 3 hold a review period rather than an incident.	Produced from the standing plan when something happens.
Reviewed and reissued on a fixed schedule whether or not anything changed.	Carries a real incident name and a real operational period.
A template.	A statement of fact. This is the one you hand to anybody.

What invalidates a plan

Trigger	What to re-verify
A household changes or adds radios	Programming matches the plan; frequency and tone entries
A member joins or leaves	Assignment column, equipment holding, licensing coverage
A license lapses or is issued	Whether every transmitting household is covered
The repeater moves, retunes or goes offline	That row and every fallback built on it
Interference forces a tone or channel change	The changed row, plus every radio in the group
A neighboring agency changes its channel plan	Monitor-only rows and related Remarks
Seasonal change	Coverage assumptions — foliage moves VHF and UHF range
The plan is used in a real event	Everything. Debrief and reissue.

The three tests

Test	What it is	What it catches
Programming check	Every household, radios in hand, plan on the table	Expect one discrepancy per four radios on the first pass
Coverage walk	Take a handheld to every place you assumed coverage	Turns assumed coverage into a fact or a correction
Cold read	A competent outsider programs a radio from your sheet, no questions	Every defect in the document itself

Full form for planning, simplified card for the field.

Field cards are generated from the current master and reissued with it, never edited on their own. Simplify by dropping columns, never by dropping channels and never by rounding frequencies.

PART II — WORKSHEETS

Blank and fillable. Complete the matching online lesson before filling any of these.

Worksheet 1 — Equipment and Licensing Inventory

Your ICS 217A starting point. Every household. Do not fill the verified column from memory.

What we have	Who holds it	What licenses it	Verified when

Worksheet 2 — Spectrum Catalog Additions

What exists around you, beyond what you own. Mark anything you may only listen to as monitor only.

Channel or system	Frequency	Who uses it locally	Monitor only?	Verified against

Worksheet 3 — Net Definitions

Three or four nets, no more. Use the standard function words.

Function	Net name	Who is on it	What it is for

Worksheet 4 — Block 4 Channel Table

One row per channel. Four decimals, bandwidth letter, tones in hertz, mode letter.

Draft here, then transfer to the real form.

This grid is a drafting aid with room to write and cross out. The document you hand to anyone is the FEMA form itself, ICS 205 v3.1, which you can download from the Course Map or at the address in Appendix C. Its Block 4 carries the same columns in the same order, so the transfer is line for line.

Ch	Function	Channel name	Assignment	RX freq	RX tone	TX freq	TX tone	Mode	Remarks

Before you accept any row, read it aloud as an instruction to a person holding a radio.

Worksheet 5 — Header Blocks and Special Instructions

Block	Your entry
1 — Incident name (an event, not your group name)	
2 — Date/time prepared	
3 — Operational period, from	
3 — Operational period, to	
5 — Coverage limits	
5 — Continuous vs called-up channels	
5 — Receive-only channels and why	
5 — Point of contact and phone	
5 — Gateway capability, and who authorizes	
6 — Prepared by, and date/time	

Worksheet 6 — Coverage Walk Log

Take a handheld to each location and key up. Record what actually happened, not what should have.

Location	Channel	Heard?	Heard back?	Notes / limitation to record in Block 5

Worksheet 7 — Capstone and Review Log

The ten-step capstone from Lesson 5. Work it in order.

#	Step	Done	Date
1	Inventory. Worksheet 1, every household. Verified column filled from checking, not memory.		
2	Fix the licensing. Every household that transmits on GMRS holds its own license.		
3	Decide your nets. Worksheet 3. Three or four, standard function words.		
4	Draft the channel table. Worksheet 4.		
5	Read every row aloud as an instruction to a person holding a radio.		
6	Fill the header blocks. Worksheet 5.		
7	Run the programming check. Every radio, against the sheet.		
8	Run the cold read. An outsider programs a radio from your sheet, no help.		
9	Print, laminate, distribute. Write the master version date on every field card.		
10	Set the next review date on a calendar somebody actually looks at.		

Revision log

Version date	What changed	Trigger	Reissued by

PART III — APPENDIX

Appendix A — Glossary

Term	Meaning
AUXCOMM	Auxiliary communications. The framework through which volunteer communicators support public safety within an incident structure.
AUXC	Auxiliary communicator. The position, reporting to the Incident Communications Center Manager or the Communications Unit Leader.
Channel	A frequency, or a pair, assigned to a purpose and preprogrammed with its tone or access code.
COML	Communications Unit Leader. Prepares the ICS-205 and authorizes patches.
CTCSS	Continuous Tone-Coded Squelch System. A subaudible tone controlling when a receiver opens. Not privacy.
DCS	Digital Coded Squelch. The digital equivalent of CTCSS.
Frequency	A defined segment of spectrum, in megahertz.
Gateway	Equipment bridging audio between otherwise incompatible radio systems.
IAP	Incident Action Plan. The document set the ICS-205 is distributed within.
NAC	Network Access Code. The P25 equivalent of a squelch tone.
Narrowbanding	The conversion of most 150–512 MHz channels from 25 kHz to 12.5 kHz.
Operational period	The window a given plan is true for. Block 3.
Simplex	Radio-to-radio, no repeater. RX and TX frequency identical.
Subscriber	The end user radio — the control station, mobile or portable. The form's point of view.
Talkgroup	A virtual channel on a trunked system. No fixed frequency.
Time slot / color code	DMR parameters needed to program a channel. No standard column on the form.

Appendix B — Quick Reference Card

One page. Print it, or copy it onto the back of your field card.

The read-aloud test.

Say the row as an instruction to a person: receive on X, transmit on Y, sending tone Z. If that is correct for somebody holding a handheld, the row is right. If you have to explain what the repeater is doing, it is wrong.

Check	Rule
Decimals	Four. Always. Even trailing zeros.
Bandwidth	N or W on every entry below 512 MHz. U exists for ultranarrow.
Tones	Hertz, 67.0 to 254.1. Never a menu number.
Repeater rows	RX is the output. TX is the input.
Simplex rows	Same frequency twice.
Function	Command, Tactical, Support, Dispatch, Ground-to-Air, Air-to-Air.
Channel names	One name. On the form, in the radio, and on the air.
Monitor-only rows	No TX entry. Say so in Remarks.
Row count	Three or four nets. Not fourteen.
Block 3	A real operational period, every time.
Block 6	A real name and a real phone number.
Field cards	Derived from the master. Never edited alone.

Three things to say out loud to your group.

A tone is not privacy.

Six unrelated households need six GMRS licenses.

A channel appearing in a national list is not permission to transmit on it.

Appendix C — Doctrinal Sources

Source	Publisher	Use
ICS Form 205, Incident Radio Communications Plan (v3.1)	FEMA	The form this course teaches; blank copy linked below
ICS Forms Booklet, block-by-block instructions	FEMA	Field completion guidance
E/L-969 All-Hazards Communications Unit Leader course	FEMA / EMI	Terminology, subscriber perspective, nets, interference
National Interoperability Field Operations Guide (NIFOG) v2.02	CISA	Current channel data and nomenclature
Programming Template for Interoperability Radio Channels	CISA (archived)	Completed ICS 217A worksheets; format and conventions
Auxiliary Communications Field Operations Guide (AUXFOG) v1.1	CISA	The auxiliary communicator role and the Communications Unit
SAFECOM Interoperability Continuum	DHS / SAFECOM	The five-lane framework
47 CFR Part 95 Subparts B, E, J	FCC	FRS, GMRS and MURS rules
47 CFR Part 97 Subpart E	FCC	Amateur emergency provisions

Links

Document	Address
ICS 205 blank form (v3.1)	https://fortunefavorstheprepared.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/ics-form-205-incident-radio-communications-plan-v3.1.pdf
CISA Field Operations Guides index	cisa.gov/safecom/field-operations-guides
NIFOG v2.02	Linked from the index above, and from Lesson 1
Programming Template	Linked from the index above, and from Lessons 2 and 3
AUXFOG v1.1	Linked from the index above, and from Lesson 4
Local frequency data	radioreference.com, plus your state field operations guide if one exists