

# SAFELY DOES IT

By Mark Breen

## USING RADIOS AT EVENTS

Working in events, you'll use two-way radios at some point. Irrespective of what type of event or where in the world you're working, you'll use radios. They are a fantastic resource and can be anything from simply handy to have through to absolutely vital to the safe running of the event.

As event professionals we need to be comfortable with their use and confident that we can use them properly in an emergency. It's in emergency situations that the radios very much become absolutely vital rather than handy to have.

In fact, as an Event Safety professional, my perspective is that radios utilised properly & effectively are one of the key tools in the success of any event. We use them to establish and maintain safe, effective management of events.

Using radios is definitely not rocket science but I've seen first hand the issues that can arise when people don't know how to use them properly or, indeed, do know but still don't use them properly. I'm sure you've seen these issues too.

We put together an Infographic, which covers some basic but key elements to the use of radios. We find it helpful even just for ourselves as a refresher tool for our own Event Team.

### The Basics

There are some simple things we need to understand about two-way radios and how they work.

The first thing is that they do not work like mobile phones / cell phones. You can not listen and speak at the same time. You need to press the button to talk and while you have the button pressed, you won't be able to hear other people relaying messages. One of the most common mistakes people make

when using radios initially is keeping the button pressed. It's important to remember to release the button otherwise you're blocking the channel.

The performance and range of radios vary depending on weather and the environment we're using them in. In urban areas with lots of buildings they can be less effective as a result of the buildings interfering with the signals. That said, in wide-open areas they can be affected more by wind and weather.

### Using a Radio

There are some key tenets we need to remember when using radios. Realistically, we're all guilty of flouting these at times but sticking to them helps ensure the radio use is as effective as it can be. Some of those include:

- Keep your messages short
- Do not interrupt other people on the radios unless you have a priority message
- Do not shout into the radio
- Wait 2 full seconds after you press the button before you talk

These are just some of the guidelines to using radios. The Infographic includes many more.

### Radio Language

There is some standard radio language that is used by those who use radios regularly, such as police forces and armies across the world. We've learned

**Two way radios**

**The basics**

- If you work in events you'll be using radios.
- Two-way radios do not work like telephones. You cannot hear and speak at the same time.
- You need to press the button to speak and you need to release the button to listen to someone else.
- Their range depends on the weather, the buildings around you and other factors.

**Using a radio**

- Keep your messages short!
- Only use the radio if absolutely necessary.
- Do not shout into the radio.
- Listen before you transmit.
- Do not turn the volume all the way up.
- Don't interrupt others unless you have a priority message!
- If you use radios regularly then inform where you carry it.
- Wait 2 full seconds after you press the button before you speak.
- Put the earpiece / headset into the radio BEFORE turning the radio on.
- Speak across the mic rather than into it.
- If you use a radio regularly then get a good personal earpiece / headset.

**Radio language**

- Go ahead (relay your message)
- Say again (repeat your message)
- Stand by (I heard your transmission but can not fully respond right now)
- Roger (I heard your message and understand it)
- Affirmative (yes)
- Negative (no)
- Over (transmission finished)
- Out (this communication is over and the channel is now available for other messages / communications)

**Standard radio alphabet**

Sometimes you will need to spell things out over the radio. This is much easier when you use this standard NATO alphabet.

A alpha	J juliet	S sierra
B bravo	K kilo	T tango
C charlie	L lima	U uniform
D delta	M mike	V victor
E echo	N november	W whiskey
F foxtrot	O oscar	X X-ray
G golf	P papa	Y yankee
H hotel	Q quebec	Z zulu
I india	R romeo	

**Did you know?**

'Over and out' is not a real thing. 'Over' means 'I'm finished talking and am awaiting your reply', whereas 'out' means 'I'm finished talking and do not expect a reply'. So, over and out makes no sense. Don't say it. You'll look silly if you do.

**Top Tips**

- It is illegal to use bad language over a two-way radio channel, so keep it clean!
- Don't forget to turn the radio on!
- Make sure you're on the right radio channel!
- On bigger events multiple radio channels will be in use. Make sure you know which one you should be on.
- Radio channels are not secure and bad people can listen in. Be careful what you say!
- Sometimes the person you want to speak to is not far away. Try giving the message to someone closer to you who may be able to relay it to the other person.
- Radio allocation and use needs to be prioritised. Not EVERYONE working an event needs a radio, generally.
- Be aware of code words being used rather than saying things like 'Cards', 'emergency' or 'incident' over the radio.
- The Communications Unit Regulator actively monitors & records two-way radio transmissions.

**CUCHOO**

We work on a lot of events and we use radio a lot. If you need help with an event or, indeed, using radios, give us a shout. We do this stuff for a living and we know what we're doing. We're nice too.

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over the years that at certain times it can be very helpful to use elements of the standard radio language. We've used it when relaying registration plate numbers, names of found children, etc.

We don't all need to be schooled into army level on these but they definitely do come in handy at times. No denying it.

### Top Tips

We've included a number of top tips in the Infographic too. These all came about from our own personal experience and that of people in the industry all around the world. We always look to crowd-source the content for these to ensure it's not just the experience of one group of people or from one country.

Some of the top tips we've included:

- **Be aware of any code words being used on the event.** There are words we don't say across an open radio channel. There are code words we use instead. For instance, words like 'bomb', 'threat', 'leak' etc. are generally avoided. With respect to a fire being discovered we have a coded sentence that would be put out on the radios as well as across the public address system.
- **Make sure you're on the channel you should be on.** Events often use multiple channels in order to effectively manage proceedings. There may be a channel dedicated to Safety & Security, another for Production, another for Technical, etc. Utilising multiple channels can be great but it's also important not to use too many unnecessarily.
- **Not everyone needs a radio.** I've rarely worked an event where everybody needed a radio. The more people with radios, the more chatter you'll have to listen to. Ensure the right people have them in order for things to work well but don't feel that everyone needs to have one.

There are more top tips in the Infographic and I'm sure we can all add even more to the list.

### The Bottom Line

Radios are a key total in the smooth and safe running of events of all shapes and sizes. We need to know how and when to use them properly. In the wrong, inexperienced hands they can be counter-productive, however. It's important that people get to use radios in a training or non-event environment to be comfortable with them. You can also distribute the Infographic, which is what has happened a lot with this one in particular.

**Mark Breen** is Co-Founder & Senior Partner of Cuckoo Events based in Dublin, Ireland. He is an award-winning event Safety Officer and one of the most experienced and qualified event safety practitioners in Ireland. He has worked at the London 2012 Olympics as well as on some of Ireland's largest outdoor events. He writes and speaks regularly on all things event-related, particularly event safety. He is a Graduate Member of the Marketing Institute of Ireland and holds a Postgraduate Diploma in PR & Events. He has specialist qualifications in Spectator Safety Management as well as Crowd Science. He is also soon to begin an MSc in Crowd Safety & Risk Analysis. Mark and the Team at Cuckoo are passionate about helping people run safer events and devote a lot of time to doing so. Mark is very active on Twitter @mark\_breen and @Cuckoo-Events. The multiple award-winning Cuckoo Events website can be found at [cuckoo.ie](http://cuckoo.ie)