National Interagency Fire Center

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Area Command Team 4 Briefing Paper

Date: August 30, 2005

Action Item 15

Name: Incident Radio Coverage

Issue/Topic: Develop Standards for Adequate Radio Coverage on Incidents

Indicators of Need for Action: Many IMTs are attempting to obtain 100% radio coverage for entire incidents including travel routes.   There has been a significant increase in communication equipment orders from the National Interagency Incident Communications Division (NIICD) to supply the increased need for larger communication systems. A variety of factors are combining to create the need for increase communication systems including fire size, spatial separation of incident facilities, topography, transportation corridors, initial attack responsibilities and an increased requirement for reliable coverage. When there is a lack of radio communication, firefighters need to maintain situational awareness, conduct a risk assessment, and mitigate the situation by seeking alterative methods. While disengagement is an alternative, it should be only one of many options considered. These standard protocols are used in other aspects of incident response, but are rarely implemented during periods of inadequate radio communications.

Key Points:
- It may not be operationally or technically feasible to establish radio communications on 100% of the incident and travel corridors.
- Mitigation measures can be employed when fighting fire in areas with less than 100% radio communications coverage. Those include:
  - Maintaining situational awareness and convey instructions
  - Exploring alternative methods of maintaining LCES
  - Evaluating risk, exposure and consequences
  - Changing location or channels
  - Modifying tactics
  - Using runners and or messengers
  - Assign human or verbal repeaters

Proposed Action Description: Develop an ad hoc group comprised of members from the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Incident Operations, Safety and Health, and Radio Narrowband Working Teams to review and develop standards for adequate radio coverage.