National Interagency Fire Center
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Area Command Team 4 Briefing Paper

Date: August 30, 2005

Action Item 5

Name: Radio Problem Reporting System

Issue/Topic: Develop protocols and implement a system for end user support, reporting radio problems and technical assistance. There currently no consistent interagency method of reporting and sharing communication issues between management, communications specialists, and users. A system or protocol is needed for reporting radio equipment failures, requesting general and specific technical information, delivering feedback of applicability of equipment under field conditions. A centralized location for training is also lacking.

Indicators of Need for Action: By reviewing documents and conducting interviews with field users and cooperators, a clear frustration exists in that little or no opportunity exists to share emerging narrowband radio problems except through the SAFENET/SAFECOM system. The exception was the Forest Service where problems could be reported to the Information Service Organization (ISO). At all levels, fire managers were frustrated by the inability to direct questions to the appropriate level for answers or solutions.

Key Points:

- The SAFECOM and SAFENET web-based hazard reporting systems are independent of each other and maintained and managed by NIFC specialists. Neither system is designed to specifically report radio problems and then provide a reference source or provide training.
- The Lessons Learned web-based wildland fire information system maintained by NTARC. It is a reference based learning system, not a training or reporting site.
- The NIFC Communications Unit maintains a communication web site that shares information but primarily only for NIFC fire equipment. The NIFC Communication Unit's current web site is used to distribute information on upgraded national cache equipment and attempts to concurrently train and educate users in the latest communication developments. Unfortunately this constitutes a very small portion of fire and aviation communication users and the information has not been universally distributed throughout the fire community.

Proposed Action Description: Establish and maintain a web based system that allows two-way communications between field units and a central radio authority. Models would be the SAFECON/SAFENET systems and the Lessons Learned Center websites and would be characterized by:

- Serving as the definitive repository of radio communication knowledge.
- The site would allow reporting of general radio equipment issues and specific problems with a piece of equipment both in field unit and incident operations.
- Solutions or training would be referenced either on the site or linked to another site.
- Where necessary the individual problem or series of problems may be referred to a specific agency for resolution.

The recommended action is to temporarily use an existing site and in the long term alter an existing site or develop a new site. Actions to redesign an existing site or build a new site will require commitment by the wildland firefighting agencies to support development, staffing, and corporate hierarchy to ensure this is an effective response to issues and problems identified.