



National Interagency Fire Center

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July 28, 2005

To: Geographic Area Coordination Group Chairs
From: National Multi-Agency Coordination Group
Subject: Command Tactical Repeaters

The National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC) is concerned with the current practice of some Incident Management Teams to routinely order extra repeaters in their pre-orders. The National Interagency Fire Center's (NIFC) National Interagency Incident Communications Division (NIICD) is the steward of seven (7) command/tactical repeater pairs to support wildland fire and other all-risk incidents. Four of these repeater pairs are authorized by the USDA and three by the Department of the Interior. Command/tactical repeaters are the key component for wildland fire communications and provide the network for tying all operational units together in support/safety of the fire suppression effort.

Theoretically, seven fires can be managed by these seven command repeaters without any interference occurring. When the eighth fire emerges the NIICD/Communications Duty Officer (CDO) must contact the National Telecommunications and Information Agency (NTIA), in Washington, DC, and request temporary frequencies. NTIA is comprised of all 23 government agencies within the United States. Time becomes a factor because they must first obtain a frequency that will be clear in the area where the fire is occurring and second, NIICD must "tune" the NIFC repeaters to the frequency that was obtained from NTIA.

Over the last several years we have seen the practice of Incident Management Teams (IMTs) using pre-orders for extra repeaters and links to be shipped with the standard "starter systems." Many times this order is received at NIFC before the Communications Unit Leader has arrived at the fire, evaluated the situation, and developed a communications plan (ICS 205) which identifies the appropriate system. What typically happens is that the team uses the extra equipment to link the command repeater (the repeater covering the fire) to another repeater which, in turn, talks into the incident base.

Fire-line communications have always been available into incident base, via the Incident Communications Center, as follows:

- NIFC/NIICD provides a remote and UHF repeater as part of a starter system.
- A UHF link can be ordered with the starter system.

- The UHF link allows a tie to the command repeater.
- This allows for the same functionality as having two command repeaters linked.
- The result is fire-line communications into incident base without using another command/tactical repeater pair.

However, there may be situations when linking two command repeaters is necessary, such as when a fire gets too large or when terrain dictates that one repeater cannot cover the operational area. In these cases another repeater is justified to provide the needed coverage.

Therefore, the NMAC requests that IMTs use the “starter systems” as they were intended, to get the team started. Once the IMT arrives at the fire and has assessed its communication needs, it should then order aUHF link to link the fire-line repeater back to camp. If the team then determines that additional coverage is still necessary, then the team should order an additional command repeater and appropriate links.

In order to effectively manage a limited resource, the NMAC will now require a justification from the Incident Commander on all orders for a second command repeater on a single incident. This justification should be sent to Kim Christensen at NICC.

We appreciate your cooperation in helping us manage our limited supply of command repeaters.

/s/ Don Artley
Chair, NMAC