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## Chapter 15 Communications

### Radio Communications

Radio communications provide for the flow of tactical information needed for the command/control of personnel and resources.

### Policy

Agency specific policies for radio communications may be found in:

- *Department of Interior, Department Manual, Radio Communications Handbook (377 DM).*
- *USDA Forest Service Handbook (FSH 6609.14 chapters 10-40 and Forest Service Manual (FSM) 6600 Systems Management Chapter 6640 - Telecommunications.*

### Radio Contracts

For information on contracts, software, and hardware requirements and approved radios, contact the National Radio Communications Division (NRCD) at (208) 387-5830.

### Dispatch Recording Devices

- *BLM - Recording devices will be used by BLM dispatch offices or any interagency office dispatching BLM resources.*

### Radio Frequency Management

- FM frequency assignments for normal operations or initial attack ground operations are made on a permanent basis and are requested through the state office ISO frequency manager to the Washington Office frequency manager.
- The NIFC Communications Duty Officer (CDO) coordinates and assigns incident frequencies at the national level. They will also assign Communications Coordinators (COMC) when necessary to support specific Geographic Areas. See the National Mobilization Guide for additional information.
- Mutual-aid agreements for frequency sharing can be made at the local level.
- A mutual-aid frequency sharing agreement is valid only in the specific locale it originates in. These agreements do not authorize the use of a shared frequency in any other area. NIFC national fire frequencies are not to be used for these agreements.
- Do not use a frequency unless authorized to do so by communications personnel at the local, state, regional or national level.
- Initial attack AM air operations frequencies will be assigned by the NIFC CDO and FM air operations frequencies will be facilitated/assigned by the NIFC CDO. These assignments will be on an interagency basis and coordinated with the GACCs.

- 1 • On Type 1 or 2 incidents, the Communications Unit Leader (COML) will  
2 request, assign, and report all frequencies used on the incident to the NIFC  
3 CDO/COMC. This would include the request and assignment of aircraft  
4 frequencies. The ICS-205 and ICS-220 are always a part of the Incident  
5 Action Plan (IAP) and distributed at every operational period briefing.
- 6 • The COML will contact the NIFC CDO, or the COMC if assigned, for  
7 additional FM and AM frequencies. Requests for aviation frequencies will  
8 be placed through established ordering channels through NICC and will be  
9 filled by the NIFC CDO or COMC. COML's will ensure that the host  
10 agency Aviation Dispatcher and the NIFC CDO or COMC has the current  
11 ICS-220 for their incident.
- 12 • Frequencies for Type 1 and Type 2 incidents are assigned through the  
13 National Interagency Incident Communications Division (NIICD) located at  
14 NIFC. The CDO is responsible for this function.
- 15 • During severe situations and/or when there are significant numbers of large  
16 incidents additional frequencies can be assigned. These are temporary  
17 assignments, and are requested by the NIFC CDO from the Washington  
18 Office (Spectrum) managers and given by the CDO to the incident. This  
19 applies to frequencies for command, ground tactical, and aviation  
20 operations.
- 21 • Additional frequencies are provided in the following circumstances:
  - 22 • The NIICD national frequencies are all committed within a specific  
23 geographic area.
  - 24 • The requests continue for frequencies to support new incidents within a  
25 specific complex.
  - 26 • The fire danger rating is extreme and the potential for additional new  
27 incidents is high.

#### 29 **Pre-assigned National Frequencies**

30 National Air Guard - 168.625 MHz - A National Interagency Air Guard  
31 frequency for government aircraft will be used for emergency aviation  
32 communications. Continuous monitoring of this frequency in narrowband mode  
33 is mandatory by agency dispatch centers. Transmitters on this frequency must  
34 be equipped with an encoder on 110.9 Hz. 168.625 is restricted to the following  
35 use:

- 36 • Air-to-air emergency contact and coordination.
- 37 • Ground-to-air emergency contact.
- 38 • Initial call, recall, and re-direction of aircraft when no other contact  
39 frequency is available.

#### 41 **National Flight Following - 168.650 MHz**

42 The National Interagency Air Net frequency is used for flight following of  
43 official aircraft. The intent is not to use this frequency for incident operations.  
44 All dispatch centers/offices will monitor the national flight following frequency

1 at all times. Transmitters on this frequency must be equipped with an encoder  
2 on 110.9. Hz. 168.650 is restricted to the following use:

- 3 • Flight following, dispatch, and/or re-direction of aircraft.
- 4 • Air-to-ground and ground-to-air administrative traffic.
- 5 • Not authorized for ground-to-ground traffic.

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7 **National Interagency Air Tactics - 166.675 MHz, 167.950 MHz, 169.150**  
8 **MHz, 169.200 MHz, 170.000 MHz**

- 9 • Frequencies used to support air-to-air or ground-to-air communications on  
10 incidents west of the 95th meridian. These frequencies shall be used for air-  
11 to-air and ground-to-air communications only.
  - 12 • Exception: Pacific Southwest Geographic Area: 166.675 MHz, 169.150  
13 MHz, and 169.200 MHz will be used for air-to-air only; 170.000 MHz  
14 will be used for ground-to-air only.
- 15 • Interagency geographic area coordination centers assign these frequencies.  
16 Assignment must be coordinated through the NIFC CDO.
- 17 • Transmitter power output of radios installed in aircraft operating on these  
18 frequencies shall be limited to 10 watts.

19

20 Base stations and repeaters are prohibited on these frequencies.

21

22 **National Interagency Airtanker Initial Call - 123.975 MHz**

23 The national interagency frequency assigned to all airtanker bases for their  
24 exclusive use. No other use outside of airtanker bases is authorized.

25

26 **National Government All-Call Frequencies - 163.100 MHz and 168.350**  
27 **MHz**

28 For use anywhere, anytime. They are good choices as travel frequencies for  
29 strike teams moving between assignments. They are available for ground  
30 tactical frequencies during initial attack or incident operations. They are not to  
31 be used for air-to-ground operations.

- 32 • **NOTE:** When you are traveling between incidents, be sure to monitor for  
33 incident radio traffic in the area before using these frequencies.

34

35 **Incident Radio Support**

36 All NIRS cache communications equipment shall be returned to NIICD at NIFC  
37 immediately after the incident is turned over to the jurisdictional agency.

38

39 No cache communication equipment shall be moved from one incident to  
40 another without being first returned to NIFC for refurbishment. However,  
41 equipment unused and red-sealed may be moved, if approval is given by the  
42 NIFC CDO or COMC.

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44 **Military Communications on an Incident**

1 Military units assigned to an incident already have radios. Each battalion is  
2 assigned 80 handheld radios. Sixteen of these radios are used by military crew  
3 liaisons. Intercrew communications within a military unit is provided by the  
4 military on their radios using their frequencies. All frequency assignments at  
5 the incident will be made by the COML in accordance with the ICS-205.

6  
7 Some active military and guard units have aviation VHF-FM radios compatible  
8 with civilian systems. Other units are adapting their aircraft for the civilian  
9 radios and can be easily outfitted prior to dispatch to an incident. A limited  
10 number of wiring harnesses are available at NIFC for those military aircraft that  
11 do not have civilian VHF-FM capability. The wiring harnesses and radios will  
12 be resource ordered by the incident. The resource order will include a request  
13 for trained personnel from NIICD to perform the installation of the equipment.  
14 Equipment will not be sent without trained and qualified personnel to install it.

15  
16 **Cellular Communications/Satellite Phone Communication**

17 Cellular/satellite telephones will not be used to communicate tactical operations  
18 unless they are the only means possible. Cellular/satellite telephones are not to  
19 be used for flight following in lieu of normal flight-following protocols.

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21 Phone communication can be used for logistical purposes.