

Chapter 15 Communications

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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

Contracts specifying the requirements for radios have been let and may be found for the:

- *DOI - Department of Interior Project 25 Digital Radio contract at <http://www.blm.gov/natacq/IDIQ/index.html>*
- *FS - USDA Forest service National Radio Contract at <http://www.fs.fed.us/business/2002%20awards/index.html>*
- *BLM - Fire equipment will be tested through a collaborative effort between the National Interagency Fire Center and the DOI Technical Support Center in Denver to verify that the radios will withstand the rugged work environments specific to fire operations and that the radios have operational features and programmability options to meet fires needs.*
- *FS/FWS/NPS - The Thales Racal, EF Johnson 5100, Motorola XTS5000, Relm/Bendix King DPH, and Datron Guardian handhelds have all been approved for fire use by the National Interagency Incident Communications Division (NIICD).*

For information on 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.

- 1 • The NIFC Communications Duty Officer (CDO) coordinates and assigns
2 incident frequencies at the national level. They will also assign
3 Communications Coordinators (COMC) when necessary to support
4 specific Geographic Area. See the National Mobilization Guide for
5 additional information.
- 6 • Mutual-aid agreements for frequency sharing can be made at the local
7 level.
- 8 • A mutual-aid frequency sharing agreement is valid only in the specific
9 locale it originates in. These agreements do not authorize the use of a
10 shared frequency in any other area. NIFC national fire frequencies are not
11 to be used for these agreements.
- 12 • Do not use a frequency unless authorized to do so by communications
13 personnel at the local, state, regional or national level.
- 14 • Initial attack AM air operations frequencies will be assigned by the NIFC
15 CDO and FM air operations frequencies will be facilitated/assigned by the
16 NIFC CDO. These assignments will be on an interagency basis and
17 coordinated with the GACCs.
- 18 • On Type 1 or 2 incidents, the Communications Unit Leader (COML) will
19 request, assign, and report all frequencies used on the incident to the NIFC
20 CDO/COMC. This would include the request and assignment of aircraft
21 frequencies. The ICS-205 and ICS-220 are always a part of the Incident
22 Action Plan (IAP) and distributed at every operational period briefing.
- 23 • The COML will contact the NIFC CDO, or the COMC if assigned, for
24 additional FM and AM frequencies. Requests for aviation frequencies will
25 be placed through established ordering channels through NICC and will be
26 filled by the NIFC CDO or COMC. COML's will ensure that the host
27 agency Aviation Dispatcher and the NIFC CDO or COMC has the current
28 ICS-220 for their incident.
- 29 • Frequencies for Type 1 and Type 2 incidents are assigned through the
30 National Interagency Incident Communications Division (NIICD) located
31 at NIFC. The CDO is responsible for this function.
- 32 • During severe situations and/or when there are significant numbers of large
33 incidents, additional frequencies can be assigned. These are temporary
34 assignments, and are requested by the NIFC CDO from the Washington
35 Office (Spectrum) managers and given by the CDO to the incident. This
36 applies to frequencies for command, ground tactical, and aviation
37 operations.
- 38 • Additional frequencies are provided in the following circumstances:
 - 39 ➤ The NIICD national frequencies are all committed within a specific
40 geographic area.
 - 41 ➤ The requests continue for frequencies to support new incidents within
42 a specific complex.
 - 43 ➤ The fire danger rating is extreme and the potential for additional new
44 incidents is high.

1 **Pre-assigned National Frequencies**

2 National Air Guard - 168.625 MHz - A National Interagency Air Guard
3 frequency for government aircraft will be used for emergency aviation
4 communications. Continuous monitoring of this frequency in narrowband mode
5 is mandatory by agency dispatch centers. Transmitters on this frequency must be
6 equipped with an encoder on 110.9 Hz. 168.625 is restricted to the following
7 use:

- 8 • Air-to-air emergency contact and coordination.
- 9 • Ground-to-air emergency contact.
- 10 • Initial call, recall, and re-direction of aircraft when no other contact
11 frequency is available.

12
13 **National Flight Following - 168.650 MHz**

14 The National Interagency Air Net frequency is used for flight following of
15 official aircraft. The intent is not to use this frequency for incident operations.
16 All dispatch centers/offices will monitor the national flight following frequency
17 at all times. 168.650 is restricted to the following use:

- 18 • Flight following, dispatch, and/or re-direction of aircraft.
- 19 • Air-to-ground and ground-to-air administrative traffic.
- 20 • Not authorized for ground-to-ground traffic.

21
22 **National Interagency Air Tactics - 166.675 MHz, 167.950 MHz, 169.150**
23 **MHz, 169.200 MHz, 170.000 MHz**

- 24 • Frequencies used to support air-to-air or ground-to-air communications on
25 incidents west of the 95th meridian. These frequencies shall be used for
26 air-to-air and ground-to-air communications only.
 - 27 ➤ Exception: Pacific Southwest Geographic Area: 166.675 MHz,
28 169.150 MHz, and 169.200 MHz will be used for air-to-air only;
29 170.000 MHz will be used for ground-to-air only.
- 30 • Interagency geographic area coordination centers assign these frequencies.
31 Assignment must be coordinated through the NIFC CDO.
- 32 • Transmitter power output of radios installed in aircraft operating on these
33 frequencies shall be limited to 10 watts.

34
35 Base stations and repeaters are prohibited on these frequencies.

36
37 **National Interagency Airtanker Initial Call - 123.975 MHz**

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

40
41 **National Government All-Call Frequencies - 163.100 MHz and 168.350**
42 **MHz**

43 For use anywhere, anytime. They are good choices as travel frequencies for
44 strike teams moving between assignments. They are available for ground

1 tactical frequencies during initial attack or incident operations. They are not to
2 be used for air-to-ground operations.

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

5
6 **Incident Radio Support**

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

9
10 No cache communication equipment shall be moved from one incident to
11 another without being first returned to NIFC for refurbishment. However,
12 equipment unused and red-sealed may be moved, if approval is given by the
13 NIFC CDO or COMC.

14
15 **Military Communications on an Incident**

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

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

29
30 **Cellular Communications/Satellite Phone Communication**

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

34
35 Phone communication can be used for logistical purposes.