

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

For information on contracts, software, hardware requirements and approved radios. Contact your agency Telecommunications Department or the NIFC Communications Duty Officer at (208) 387-5644.

- *BLM - For information on BLM 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 operations are made on a permanent basis and are requested through the state office. ISO frequency manager to the Washington Office frequency manager.
- Do not use any frequency without proper authorization from the authorized radio frequency management personnel at the local, state, regional or national level.
- The NIFC Communications Duty Officer (CDO) coordinates and assigns incident frequencies at the national level. The CDO will also request the GACC to 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.

- 1 • Initial attack AM air operations frequencies will be assigned by the NIFC
2 CDO and FM air operations frequencies will be facilitated/assigned by the
3 NIFC CDO. These assignments will be on an interagency basis and
4 coordinated with the GACCs.
- 5 • On Type 1 or 2 incidents, the Communications Unit Leader (COML) will
6 request, assign, and report all frequencies used on the incident to the NIFC
7 CDO/COMC. This includes the request and assignment of aircraft
8 frequencies. The ICS-205 and ICS-220 are always a part of the Incident
9 Action Plan (IAP) and distributed at the operational period briefing.
- 10 • The COML will contact the NIFC CDO, or the COMC if assigned, for
11 additional FM and AM frequencies. Requests for aviation frequencies will
12 be placed through established ordering channels, through NICC, to be filled
13 by the NIFC CDO or COMC. COML's will ensure that the host agency
14 Aviation Dispatcher and the NIFC CDO or COMC have the current ICS-
15 220 for their incident.
- 16 • Incidents that do not have an assigned COML will coordinate and request
17 all additional frequency and communication equipment needs through the
18 NIFC CDO and/or the COMC.
- 19 • Frequencies for Type 1 and Type 2 incidents are assigned through the
20 National Interagency Incident Communications Division (NIICD) located at
21 NIFC. The CDO is responsible for this function.
- 22 • When there are significant numbers of large incidents additional frequencies
23 can be assigned. These assignments are temporary, and are requested by the
24 NIFC CDO from the Washington Office (Spectrum) managers and given by
25 the CDO to the incident. This applies to frequencies for command, ground
26 tactical, and aviation operations.
- 27 • Additional frequencies are provided in the following circumstances:
 - 28 ➤ The NIICD national frequencies are all committed within a specific
29 geographic area.
 - 30 ➤ The requests continue for frequencies to support new incidents within a
31 specific complex.
 - 32 ➤ The fire danger rating is extreme and the potential for additional new
33 incidents is high.

34 **Pre-assigned National Frequencies**

35 National Air Guard - 168.6250 MHz - A National Interagency Air Guard
36 frequency for government aircraft will be used for emergency aviation
37 communications. Continuous monitoring of this frequency in narrowband mode
38 is mandatory by agency dispatch centers. Transmitters on this frequency must
39 be equipped with an encoder on 110.9 Hz. 168.6250 is restricted to the
40 following use:

- 41 • Air-to-air emergency contact and coordination.
- 42 • Ground-to-air emergency contact.
- 43

- 1 • Initial call, recall, and re-direction of aircraft when no other contact
2 frequency is available.
3

4 **National Flight Following - 168.6500 MHz**

5 The National Flight Following Frequency is used to monitor interagency and
6 contract aircraft. This frequency is used for flight following, official aircraft
7 flying point to point; and is not intended to be used during mission flights or
8 incident operations. All dispatch centers/offices will monitor the national flight
9 following frequency at all times. Transmitters on this frequency must be
10 equipped with an encoder on 110.9 Hz. This frequency is restricted to the
11 following use:

- 12 • Flight following, dispatch, and/or re-direction of aircraft.
13 • Air-to-ground and ground-to-air administrative traffic.
14 • Not authorized for ground-to-ground traffic.
15

16 **National Interagency Air Tactics - 166.6750 MHz, 167.9500 MHz, 169.1500**
17 **MHz, 169.2000 MHz, 170.0000 MHz**

- 18 • These frequencies used to support air-to-air or ground-to-air
19 communications on incidents west of the 95th meridian. These frequencies
20 shall be used for air-to-air and ground-to-air communications only.
21 • Transmitter power output of radios installed in aircraft operating on these
22 frequencies shall be limited to 10 watts. Base stations and repeaters are
23 prohibited on these frequencies.
24 • These frequencies will be assigned by the NIFC CDO/COMC or in
25 coordination with the local unit if a National Telecommunications and
26 Information Administration Radio Frequency Authorization (NTIA-RFA) is
27 in effect.
28

29 **National Interagency Airtanker Base Frequency Initial Call - 123.9750**
30 **MHz**

31 This frequency is assigned by the FAA to all airtanker bases (unless otherwise
32 notified) for exclusive use. It is restricted to a radius of 40 nautical miles and
33 10,000 feet MSL from the coordinates of the airtanker base. No other use is
34 authorized.
35

36 **National Government All-Call Frequencies - 163.1000 MHz and 168.3500**
37 **MHz**

38 These frequencies are used on a non-interference basis and are not exclusive to
39 any user. These frequencies are not to be used for air-to-ground operations and
40 are prohibited by DOI and USDA from use as a frequency during operations
41 involving the protection of life and property.

- 42 • **NOTE:** When traveling between incidents, be sure to monitor for incident
43 radio traffic in the area before using these frequencies.
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1 **National Interagency Fire Tactical Frequencies**

2 **168.0500 MHz, 168.200 MHz, 168.6000 MHz, 168.2500 MHz, 167.1375**
3 **MHz, 166.7250 MHz, 166.7750 MHz**

4 These frequencies are used to support ground tactical operations (line of sight)
5 on incidents.

6 They are not authorized for:

- 7 • Air to air communications
- 8 • Air to ground communications
- 9 • Mobile radios with more than 5 watts output power
- 10 • Base stations
- 11 • Repeater frequencies

12

13 Use of these frequencies will be coordinated between the COML and the
14 CDO/COMC. Power output is limited to 5 watts or less.

15

16 **Incident Radio Support**

17 All NIRSC communications equipment will be returned to NIICD at NIFC
18 immediately after the incident is turned over to the jurisdictional agency.

19

20 No cache communication equipment shall be moved from one incident to
21 another without being first returned to NIFC for refurbishment. Equipment
22 unused and red-sealed may be moved, if approval is given by the NIFC CDO or
23 COMC.

24

25 **Military Communications on an Incident**

26 Military units assigned to an incident have been assigned radios. Each battalion
27 has 80 handheld radios. Sixteen of these radios are used by military crew
28 liaisons. Intercrew communications within a military unit is provided by the
29 military on their radios using their frequencies. All frequency assignments at
30 the incident will be made by the COML in accordance with the ICS-205.

31

32 Some units have aviation VHF-FM radios compatible with civilian systems.

33 Other units are adapting their aircraft for the civilian radios and can be easily
34 outfitted prior to dispatch to an incident. A limited number of wiring harnesses
35 are available at NIFC for those military aircraft that don't have civilian VHF-
36 FM capability. Wiring harnesses and radios will be resource ordered by the
37 incident. The resource order will include a request for trained personnel from
38 NIICD to perform the installation of the equipment. Equipment will not be sent
39 without trained and qualified personnel to install it.

40

41 Phone communication can be used for logistical purposes.