



## National Interagency Fire Center

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### Area Command Team 4 Briefing Paper

**Date:** August 30, 2005

#### **Action Item 12**

**Name:** State Forestry Survey

**Issue/Topic:** Conduct Survey of State Forestry Agencies Produced by Area Command Team

**Indicators of Need for Action:** Area Command contacted numerous states to validate wideband/narrowband and other interoperability conflicts and to solicit suggestions on how to mitigate the problems. Most states indicated they were experiencing radio communication problems with federal agencies but were able to mitigate most of these conflicts through various work arounds. Most states were 50%-100% narrow band capable.

Concerns expressed by states included:

- Programming errors.
- Narrowband repeaters are being used exclusively while non-narrow band portables and mobiles are on the incident.
- Only narrow band frequencies are being selected by COMLs and used extensively for unified or interagency incidents which involves portables/mobiles that are wideband.
- Fire activity was limited this year so systems have not really been tested.
- Many states do not plan to transition to digital.
- Do not surplus wideband radios for local and state entities.
- Many local fire departments are operating on wideband, UHF, or 800 MHZ and will continue to do so.
- Many state governments are planning or currently implementing statewide 800 MHZ trunking systems for fire departments and local government

Mitigation measures employed by state forestry agencies this summer for wideband/narrow conflicts and other interoperability issues include:

- Developed and published radio operator guides.
- Narrowband radio loaner program for cooperators and personnel assigned to federal incidents.
- Emphasis on local training.
- Continued testing of equipment capabilities.
- Statewide Interoperable Communication Working Groups established and functioning in some states.
- Programming the national interoperable frequencies and tones into radios.

Connecting disparate frequency bands through gateways that allow for radios of various bands to communicate with each other

**Key Points:**

- Many states will require additional time to complete transition to narrowband.
- State forestry agencies often function as interface between federal and local resources for communication and tactical operations.
- State forestry agencies make their own decisions regarding narrowband and the level of transition from complete implementation to no transition.
- Local fire departments operate radio communications on a wide range of frequencies and bands.
- State forestry agencies are responsible for protection of more than 800 million acres of forest and range lands and are key cooperators to federal agencies.
- Federal agencies need to recognize the scope of the issue of maintaining communications with state forestry agencies.

**Proposed Action Description:** Conduct a survey of state forestry agencies to determine status of transition to narrowband and other interoperability issues. See attached sample survey format.

Capture success stories on mitigating interoperability.

Federal agencies should recognize the need to utilize capabilities for mix mode/cross banding equipment to ensure adequate communications with states are maintained.

Improving interoperability between federal and state agencies for the long term requires improved coordination and partnerships, spectrum management, funding, standards and technology and security.