



## National Interagency Fire Center

3838 S. Development Avenue  
Boise, Idaho 83705

### Area Command Team 4 Briefing Paper

**Date:** August 30, 2005

#### **Action Item 2**

**Name:** Interagency Communications Working Group

**Issue/Topic:** Establish National Fireline Communications Oversight and Working Group

Oversight, leadership and policy development by an interagency national level group is essential to prevent continued long-term safety issues related to radio communications. Assignments could be accepted by current fire leadership groups such as WFLC, NWCG or NFAEB, or assigned to another group or team by one of these national groups. However, it is key that the parent organization have the authority to direct agencies and work groups.

The current situation is somewhat dysfunctional with no clear path to the future. Agencies act independently of each other. Additionally, units within a particular agency often act independently in procurement, programming and training exacerbating the conflicts causing major breakdowns in training, procurement and operations.

#### **Indicators of Need for Action:**

**Training** - The current policy of revising courses on a schedule does not allow the incorporation of new and emerging technology. Additionally, training policy does not provide for recurring or continuing education of incident assigned personnel. This is not unique to communications training.

The use of at least, six (6) different kinds of handheld radios makes detailed, standardized training for use, programming and maintenance nearly impossible. Users are faced with a number of different radios over the course of a single season.

**Procurement** - The current situation of locally procuring a number of radios has put the wildland fire community in an untenable position. Radios and equipment are purchased locally from a variety of sources with equipment servicing a local function as well. Department and agency leadership must develop oversight of this function to enhance standardization. This must be done while maintaining practical consideration of the overall cost investment in relation to what the true needs are on the fire ground and for aviation. The package must meet agency procurement regulations.

**Staffing** - It appears there is inadequate staffing to meet the radio communications needs of the wildland fire community. Many Communications Unit Leaders (COML) do not have the tools, training or experience to troubleshoot, repair or program the incident radios. Some COML work in

radio or telecommunications as their normal job and normally have the equipment and tools necessary to perform at a high level. However, these same individuals may be dispatched away from their home unit and not have the tools and equipment necessary to complete the assigned work.

**Key Points:**

- Comprehensive National interagency strategy for fire line communications is lacking.
- Inconsistent Procurement methods exacerbate radio communication issues.
- Training does not currently meet needs.
- Local interpretation of national policy dilutes effectiveness of standardization goals.

**Proposed Action Description:** Empower a national group to provide oversight and leadership for wildland fire communications. This group will craft interagency policy and ensure effective electronic communications on fires and emergency situations.

Revise national policy to require radio operation and use elements as part of annual refresher training. Certification of this training should be required prior to the issuance of Incident Qualifications Card. Provide all firefighters with this training on the internet.

Task the technology development centers to evaluate or determine the fireline communication solutions for the future. These solutions will consider the impacts on all wildland firefighters.

Develop national policy that would lead to the procurement of a single brand and type radio for handheld, mobile and incident repeater applications.

Procure a single type or brand of radio within each of the areas, handheld, mobile, base and repeater. Military procurement follows this principle. Multiple types and brands lead to confusion, increased costs and lack of compatibility can compromise safety. Explore the possibility of procuring radios and maintenance on a national scale.

National policy revised to allow radios to be programmed on incidents or on details.