

## 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, 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

**XXX Recording of phone calls without all party's prior knowledge and consent is not permitted. Recording of radio traffic is appropriate.**

- *BLM – XXX Radio recording devices will be used by BLM dispatch offices or any interagency office dispatching BLM resources.*

### Radio Frequency Management

~~• XXX 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~~

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

1 Frequencies shall not be used without express permission from the local, state,  
2 regional, or national level designated frequency management personnel.

3

#### 4 **XXX Daily Operational Frequency Management**

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6 XXX Frequency assignments for normal day to day and initial attack operations  
7 are made on a permanent basis and are requested through the normal Radio  
8 Frequency Authorization process from the local, state, regional or national level  
9 designated frequency management personnel.

10

11 Air operations initial attack frequencies, both AM and FM, will be assigned by  
12 the NIFC CDO. These assignments will be on an interagency basis and  
13 coordinated with the GACCs.

14

#### 15 **XXX Mutual Aid Frequency Management**

16

17 Mutual-aid frequency sharing agreements can be made at the local level.  
18 However, mutual-aid frequency sharing agreements are only valid in the specific  
19 location where they originated. These agreements do not authorize the use of a  
20 shared frequency other than in the specified local area.

21

22 NIFC national fire frequencies are not to be used for these agreements. The  
23 only exception may occur when an agency holds a National  
24 Telecommunications Information Agency (NTIA) Radio Frequency  
25 Authorization (RFA) for a frequency that is included in the NIFC Channeling  
26 Plan. If this occurs, notification and coordination with the NIFC CDO is  
27 requested.

28

#### 29 **XXX Incident Frequency Management**

30

31 National level coordination and assignments of incident frequencies is the  
32 responsibility of the National Interagency Incident Communications Division  
33 (NIICD) and is managed by the NIFC CDO.

34

35 When communications requirements exceed normal operations the NIFC CDO  
36 may request Geographic Area Coordination Centers (GACC) assign a  
37 Communication Coordinator (COMC) to facilitate geographic area frequency  
38 management. Additional information may be found in the *National Interagency*  
39 *Mobilization Guide*.

40

- 41 • Type 1 and 2 incident frequencies are assigned by the NIFC CDO and are  
42 managed by a qualified Communications Unit Leader (COML). The  
43 COML will request, assign, and report all frequencies used on the incident  
44 to the NIFC CDO/COMC. This will include the request and assignment of  
45 all aircraft frequencies. Frequency use will be documented on the ICS-205  
46 Incident Radio Communications Plan and on ICS-220 Air Operation

1 Summary forms. These completed forms will be made available to incident  
2 personnel.

- 3
- 4 • Type 3 incidents, or other incidents that do not have an assigned COML,  
5 will coordinate and request all frequency and communication equipment  
6 needs through the COMC and/or the NIFC CDO.

7

8 If additional frequencies are required, the COML will order them through the  
9 established ordering process.

10

11 Additional frequencies for any operation may be available on a temporary basis,  
12 and may be requested by the NIFC CDO from the Washington Office  
13 (Spectrum) managers when:

- 14 • The NIICD national frequencies are all committed within a specific  
15 geographic area.
- 16 • New incidents within a specific complex create a need for additional  
17 frequencies.
- 18 • The fire danger rating is extreme and the potential for additional new  
19 incidents is high.
- 20 • When there is frequency congestion due to significant numbers of incidents  
21 in close proximity.

### 22 **XXX Aviation Operations Frequency Management**

- 23
- 24 • XXX Air to Air initial attack –AM frequencies are assigned yearly to the  
25 GACC's by the NIFC CDO in coordination with the Federal Aviation  
26 Administration (FAA). Once assigned, management of those frequencies is  
27 the responsibility of the GACC and may be allocated to zones. Frequencies  
28 allocated to zones for initial attack are not to be dedicated for project fire  
29 use. If additional frequencies are required, they must be requested from and  
30 assigned by the NIFC CDO.

- 31
- 32 • Air to Ground –FM frequencies will be assigned and coordinated by the  
33 NIFC CDO and agency frequency managers.

34

35

36 Both AM and FM aviation frequency assignments will be used on an  
37 interagency basis and a master record of these assignments is maintained by the  
38 NIFC CDO. Updated frequency information is coordinated annually with the  
39 GACC's.

### 40 **Pre-assigned National Frequencies**

41

42

43 **National Air Guard XXX Frequency**  
44 **168.6250 MHz**

1 A National Interagency Air Guard frequency for **XXX government** aircraft will  
2 be used for emergency aviation communications. Continuous monitoring of this  
3 frequency in narrowband mode is mandatory by agency dispatch centers. **XXX**  
4 **Transmitters** Transmission on this frequency must **XXX be equipped with an**  
5 **encoder on** include the Continuous Tone Coded Squelch System (CTCSS) tone  
6 of 110.9 Hz.

7  
8 **XXX This frequency, 168.6250 XXX MHz** is restricted to the following use:

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

13  
14 **National Flight Following XXX Frequency**

15 **168.6500 MHz**

16 The National Flight Following Frequency is used to monitor interagency and  
17 contract aircraft. This frequency is used for flight following and official aircraft  
18 flying point to point; **XXX and it** is not **XXX intended** to be used during mission  
19 flights or incident operations.

20  
21 All dispatch centers/offices will monitor the national flight following frequency  
22 at all times. **XXX Transmitters on this frequency must be equipped with an**  
23 **encoder on 110.9 Hz** A CTCSS tone of 110.9 must be placed on the transmitter  
24 and receiver of the National Flight Following frequency.

25  
26 This frequency **XXX 168.6500 MHz** is restricted to the following use:

- 27 • Flight following, dispatch, and/or re-direction of aircraft.
- 28 • Air-to-ground and ground-to-air administrative traffic.
- 29 • Not authorized for ground-to-ground traffic.

30  
31 **National Interagency Air Tactics XXX Frequencies**

32 **166.6750 MHz, 167.9500 MHz, 169.1500 MHz,**

33 **169.2000 MHz, 170.0000 MHz XXX166.6875 MHz, 171.1375MHz**

34 These frequencies **XXX are** used to support air-to-air or ground-to-air  
35 communications on incidents west of the 95th meridian. These frequencies shall  
36 be used for air-to-air and ground-to-air communications only. **XXX They are not**  
37 **for use as ground tactical operational frequencies.**

38  
39 **XXX Transmitter power output of radios installed in aircraft operating on these**  
40 **frequencies shall be limited to 10 watts. Base stations and repeaters are**  
41 **prohibited on these frequencies.** Transmitter power output of radios installed in  
42 aircraft utilizing these frequencies shall be limited to 10 watts. Use of these  
43 frequencies in base stations and repeaters is prohibited.

44  
45 These frequencies will be assigned by the NIFC CDO **XXX/COMC** or in  
46 coordination with the local unit if a **XXX National Telecommunications and**

1 Information Administration Radio Frequency Authorization (NTIA-RFA) is in  
2 effect.

3

4 **National Interagency Airtanker Base Frequency ~~XXX Initial Call-~~**  
5 **123.9750 MHz**

6 This frequency is assigned by the FAA to all airtanker bases (unless otherwise  
7 notified) for exclusive use. ~~XXX It is Use~~ of this frequency is restricted to a  
8 radius of 40 nautical miles and 10,000 feet MSL from the coordinates of the  
9 airtanker base. No other use is authorized.

10

11 **~~XXX National Government All-Call Frequencies—Government-wide Area~~**  
12 **~~Common User Frequencies~~**

13 **163.1000 MHz and 168.3500 MHz**

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

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

20

21 **National Interagency Fire Tactical Frequencies**

22 **168.0500 MHz, 168.200 MHz, 168.6000 MHz, 168.2500 MHz,**  
23 **164.1375 MHz, 166.7250 MHz, 166.7750 MHz**

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

26 They are not authorized for:

- 27 • Air to air communications
- 28 • Air to ground communications
- 29 • Mobile radios with more than 5 watts output power
- 30 • Base stations
- 31 • Repeater frequencies

32

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

35

36 **Incident Radio Support**

37

38 All ~~XXX National Incident Radio Support Cache (NIRSC)~~ communications  
39 equipment will be returned to ~~XXX NIFC NIRSC~~ at NIFC immediately after  
40 the incident is turned over to the jurisdictional agency.

41

42 No cache communications equipment shall be moved from one incident to  
43 another without being first returned to ~~XXX NIFC NIRSC~~ for refurbishment.

44 ~~XXX Equipment unused and red sealed may be moved, if approval is given by~~

1 the NIFC CDO or COMC. Unused and red-sealed equipment may be moved, but  
2 only upon approval of the NUFC CDO or COMC.

3

4

5

#### 6 **Military Communications on an Incident**

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

13

14 Some units have aviation VHF-FM radios compatible with civilian systems.  
15 Other units are adapting their aircraft for the civilian radios and can be easily  
16 outfitted prior to dispatch to an incident. A limited number of wiring harnesses  
17 are available at ~~XXX NIFC~~ NIICD for those military aircraft ~~XXX that don't~~  
18 ~~have not having~~ civilian VHF-FM capability. Wiring harnesses and radios will  
19 be resource ordered by the incident. The resource order will include a request  
20 for ~~XXX trained~~ qualified personnel from NIICD to perform the installation of  
21 the equipment. Equipment will not be sent without ~~XXX trained and~~ qualified  
22 personnel to install it.

23

#### 24 **XXX Cellular/Satellite Phone Communications**

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26 ~~XXX Cellular/satellite~~ telephones will not be used to communicate tactical or  
27 operational traffic unless no other means are available. Cellular/satellite  
28 telephones will not be used for flight following in lieu of normal flight following  
29 procedures. Telephone communications may be used for logistical purposes.