

Chapter 15 Communications

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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.*

Dispatch Recording Devices

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

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

Cellular/Satellite Phone Communications

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

Radio Communications

Radio communications provide for the flow of tactical information needed for the command/control of personnel and resources.

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.*

Radio Frequency Management

FM frequencies are authorized and assigned by the designated Washington Office frequency manager and managed by the state and local Communications 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 **Daily Operational Frequency Management**

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

9

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

13

14 **Mutual Aid Frequency Management**

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

19

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

26

27 **Incident Frequency Management**

28 National level coordination and assignments of incident frequencies is the
29 responsibility of the National Interagency Incident Communications Division
30 (NIICD) and is managed by the NIFC CDO.

31

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

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

- 1 • Type 3 incidents, or other incidents that do not have an assigned COML,
2 will coordinate and request all frequency and communication equipment
3 needs through the COMC and/or the NIFC CDO.
4
- 5 If additional frequencies are required, the COML will order them through the
6 established ordering process.
7
- 8 Additional frequencies for any operation may be available on a temporary basis,
9 and may be requested by the NIFC CDO from the Washington Office
10 (Spectrum) managers when:
- 11 • The NIICD national frequencies are all committed within a specific
12 geographic area.
 - 13 • New incidents within a specific complex create a need for additional
14 frequencies.
 - 15 • The fire danger rating is extreme and the potential for additional new
16 incidents is high.
 - 17 • When there is frequency congestion due to significant numbers of incidents
18 in close proximity.
- 19

20 **Aviation Operations Frequency Management**

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

31 Both AM and FM aviation frequency assignments will be used on an
32 interagency basis and a master record of these assignments is maintained by the
33 NIFC CDO. Updated frequency information is coordinated annually with the
34 GACC’s.

35

36 **Pre-assigned National Frequencies**

37 **National Air Guard Frequency**

38 **168.6250 MHz**

39 A National Interagency Air Guard frequency for aircraft will be used for
40 emergency aviation communications. Continuous monitoring of this frequency
41 in narrowband mode is mandatory by agency dispatch centers. Transmission on
42 this frequency must include the Continuous Tone Coded Squelch System
43 (CTCSS) tone of 110.9 Hz.
44
45

- 1 This frequency, 168.6250 MHz is restricted to the following use:
2 • Air-to-air emergency contact and coordination.
3 • Ground-to-air emergency contact.
4 • Initial call, recall, and re-direction of aircraft when no other contact
5 frequency is available.

6

7 **National Flight Following Frequency**

8 **168.6500 MHz**

9 The National Flight Following Frequency is used to monitor interagency and
10 contract aircraft. This frequency is used for flight following and official aircraft
11 flying point to point; it is not to be used during mission flights or incident
12 operations.

13

14 All dispatch centers/offices will monitor the national flight following frequency
15 at all times. A CTCSS tone of 110.9 must be placed on the transmitter and
16 receiver of the National Flight Following frequency.

17

18 This frequency 168.6500 MHz is restricted to the following use:

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

22

23 **National Interagency Air Tactics Frequencies**

24 **166.6750 MHz, 167.9500 MHz, 169.1500 MHz,**
25 **169.2000 MHz, 170.0000 MHz 166.6875 MHz, 171.1375 MHz**

26 These frequencies are used to support air-to-air or ground-to-air
27 communications on incidents west of the 95th meridian. These frequencies shall
28 be used for air-to-air and ground-to-air communications only. They are not for
29 use as ground tactical operational frequencies.

30

31 Transmitter power output of radios installed in aircraft utilizing these
32 frequencies shall be limited to 10 watts. Use of these frequencies in base stations
33 and repeaters is prohibited.

34

35 These frequencies will be assigned by the NIFC CDO or in coordination with
36 the local unit if a NTIA-RFA is in effect.

37

38 **National Interagency Airtanker Base Frequency 123.9750 MHz**

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

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1 Government-wide Area Common User Frequencies**2 163.1000 MHz and 168.3500 MHz**

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

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

10 National Interagency Fire Tactical Frequencies

11 168.0500 MHz, 168.200 MHz, 168.6000 MHz, 168.2500 MHz,

12 164.1375 MHz, 166.7250 MHz, 166.7750 MHz

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

15
16 They are not authorized for:

- 17 • Air to air communications
- 18 • Air to ground communications
- 19 • Mobile radios with more than 5 watts output power
- 20 • Base stations
- 21 • Repeater frequencies

22
23 Use of these frequencies will be coordinated between the COML and the NIFC
24 CDO/COMC. Power output is limited to 5 watts or less.

26 Incident Radio Support

27
28 All National Incident Radio Support Cache (NIRSC) communications
29 equipment will be returned to NIRSC at NIFC immediately after the incident is
30 turned over to the jurisdictional agency.

31
32 No cache communications equipment shall be moved from one incident to
33 another without being first returned to NIRSC for refurbishment. Unused and
34 red-sealed equipment may be moved, but only upon approval of the NUFC CDO
35 or COMC.

37 Military Communications on an Incident

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

44
45 Some units have aviation VHF-FM radios compatible with civilian systems.
46 Other units are adapting their aircraft for the civilian radios and can be easily

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- 1 outfitted prior to dispatch to an incident. A limited number of wiring harnesses
- 2 are available at NIICD for those military aircraft not having civilian VHF-FM
- 3 capability. Wiring harnesses and radios will be resource ordered by the incident.
- 4 The resource order will include a request for qualified personnel from NIICD to
- 5 perform the installation of the equipment. Equipment will not be sent without
- 6 qualified personnel to install it.