

Chapter 15 Communications

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.

Refer to Chapter 7 for policy regarding use of mobile devices while operating a vehicle.

Radio Communications

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

- **BLM/FWS**- *To ensure safe and efficient suppression operations, all BLM/FWS fire resources will use a standard GPS datum and latitude/longitude (coordinate) format when communicating GPS references. The standard datum is WGS84, and the standard coordinate format is Degrees Decimal Minutes (DDM). For other activities (e.g. mapping, fire reporting, planning), agency standards will apply.*

Radio Contracts

Radios used for fire and aviation activities must be approved by the National Interagency Incident Communication Division (NIICD). Information on contracts, software, hardware requirements and approved radios is available at: <http://www/nifc.gov/NIICD/documents.html>, or contact your agency

- 1 Telecommunications Department or the National Interagency Fire Center
2 Communications Duty Officer (NIFC CDO) at (208) 387-5644.
3 • **BLM** - For information on BLM contracts, software, and hardware
4 requirements and approved radios, contact the Branch of Radio Operations
5 (FA-350) at (208) 387-5830.
6

7 **Radio Frequency Management**

8
9 FM frequencies are authorized and assigned by the designated Washington
10 Office frequency manager and managed by the state and local Communications
11 Officers. Frequencies shall not be used without express permission from the
12 local, state, regional, or national level designated frequency management
13 personnel.
14

15 **Daily Operational Frequency Management**

16 Frequency assignments for normal daily and initial attack operations are made
17 on a permanent basis and are requested through the normal Radio Frequency
18 Authorization process from the local, state, regional or national level designated
19 frequency management personnel.
20

21 Air operations initial attack frequencies, both AM and FM, will be assigned by
22 the NIFC CDO. These assignments will be on an interagency basis and
23 coordinated with the Geographic Area Coordination Centers (GACCs).
24

25 **Mutual Aid Frequency Management**

26 Mutual aid frequency sharing agreements can be made at the local level.
27 However, mutual-aid frequency sharing agreements are only valid in the specific
28 location where they originated. These agreements do not authorize the use of a
29 shared frequency other than in the specified local area.
30

31 NIFC national fire frequencies are not to be used for these agreements. The
32 only exception may occur when an agency holds a National
33 Telecommunications Information Agency (NTIA) Radio Frequency
34 Authorization (RFA) for a frequency that is included in the NIFC Channeling
35 Plan. If this occurs, notification and coordination with the NIFC CDO is
36 requested.
37

38 **Incident Frequency Management**

39 National level coordination and assignments of incident frequencies is the
40 responsibility of the National Interagency Incident Communications Division
41 (NIICD) and is managed by the NIFC CDO.
42

43 When communications requirements exceed normal operations, the NIFC CDO
44 may request that GACCs assign a Communication Coordinator (COMC) to

1 facilitate geographic area frequency management. Additional information may
2 be found in the *National Interagency Mobilization Guide*.

- 3 • Frequencies for Type 1 and 2 incidents are assigned by the NIFC CDO and
4 are managed by a qualified Communications Unit Leader (COML). The
5 COML will request, assign, and report all frequencies used on the incident
6 to the NIFC CDO/COMC. This will include the request and assignment of
7 all aircraft frequencies. Frequency use will be documented on the ICS-205
8 Incident Radio Communications Plan and on ICS-220 Air Operation
9 Summary forms. These completed forms will be made available to incident
10 personnel.
- 11 • Type 3 incidents, or other incidents that do not have an assigned COML,
12 will coordinate and request all frequency and communication equipment
13 needs through the COMC and/or the NIFC CDO.

14
15 If additional frequencies are required, the COML will order them through the
16 established ordering process.

17
18 Additional frequencies for any operation may be available on a temporary basis,
19 and may be requested by the NIFC CDO from the Washington Office Spectrum
20 managers when:

- 21 • The NIICD national frequencies are all committed within a specific
22 geographic area;
- 23 • New incidents within a specific complex create a need for additional
24 frequencies;
- 25 • The fire danger rating is extreme and the potential for additional new
26 incidents is high; and/or
- 27 • When there is frequency congestion due to significant numbers of incidents
28 in close proximity.

29

30 **Aviation Operations Frequency Management**

- 31 • Air to Air initial attack –AM frequencies are assigned yearly to the GACC's
32 by the NIFC CDO in coordination with the Federal Aviation Administration
33 (FAA). Once assigned, management of those frequencies is the
34 responsibility of the GACC and may be allocated to zones. Frequencies
35 allocated to zones for initial attack are not to be dedicated for project fire
36 use. If additional frequencies are required, they must be requested from and
37 assigned by the NIFC CDO.
- 38 • Air to Ground –FM frequencies will be assigned and coordinated by the
39 NIFC CDO and agency frequency managers.

40

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

45

1 Pre-assigned National Frequencies

2

3 National Air Guard Frequency (168.6250 MHz)

4 A National Interagency Air Guard frequency for aircraft will be used for
5 emergency aviation communications. Continuous monitoring of this frequency
6 in narrowband mode is mandatory by agency dispatch centers. Transmission on
7 this frequency must include the Continuous Tone Coded Squelch System
8 (CTCSS) tone of 110.9 Hz.

9

10 This frequency, 168.6250 MHz is restricted to the following use:

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

15

16 National Flight Following Frequency (168.6500 MHz)

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

21

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

25

26 This frequency 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; and
- 29 • Not authorized for ground-to-ground traffic.

30

**31 National Interagency Air Tactics Frequencies (166.6750 MHz, 167.9500
32 MHz, 169.1500 MHz, 169.2000 MHz, 170.0000 MHz)**

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

37

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

41

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

44

45

1 **National Interagency Airtanker Base Frequency (123.9750 MHz)**

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

6

7 **Smokejumper and Rappel/RADS Air to Ground Frequency (168.550 MHz)**

8 BLM and USFS Smokejumpers have been granted exclusive use of primary
9 National Air to Ground tactical frequency 168.550.

10

11 This frequency is also granted for use, with a separate transmit and receive tone,
12 as a secondary/backup frequency for the BLM and USFS Rappel/Rope Assisted
13 Delivery System (RADS) aerial delivery operations if the local air to ground
14 tactical frequency is being used for initial attack operations and use of that local
15 frequency could cause interference issues.

16

17 Use of this frequency for other than the delivery of aerial firefighters is
18 prohibited. This frequency must be toned (CTCSS, transmit and receive) for
19 Smokejumper and Rappel/RADS crews to ensure that interference issues are
20 avoided. Smokejumpers will use tone 123.0 and Rappel/RADS crews will use
21 tone 110.9.

22

23 **Government-wide Area Common User Frequencies (163.1000 MHz,
24 168.3500 MHz)**

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

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

31

32 **National Interagency Fire Tactical Frequencies(168.0500 MHz, 168.200
33 MHz, 168.6000 MHz, 168.2500 MHz, 166.7250 MHz, 166.7750 MHz)**

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

36

37 They are not authorized for:

- 38 • Air to air communications;
- 39 • Air to ground communications;
- 40 • Mobile radios with more than 5 watts output power;
- 41 • Base stations; or
- 42 • Repeater frequencies.

43

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

46

1 Incident Radio Support

2

3 All National Incident Radio Support Cache (NIRSC) communications
4 equipment will be returned to NIRSC at NIFC immediately after the incident is
5 turned over to the jurisdictional agency.

6

7 No cache communications equipment shall be moved from one incident to
8 another without being first returned to NIRSC for refurbishment. Unused and
9 red-sealed equipment may be moved, but only upon approval of the NIFC CDO
10 or COMC.

11

12 Military Communications on an Incident

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14 Military units assigned to an incident are assigned radios approved for use on
15 incidents. Each battalion is typically assigned 80 handheld radios. Sixteen of
16 these radios are used by military crew liaisons. Intercrew communications
17 within a military unit is provided by the military on their radios using their
18 frequencies. All frequency assignments at the incident will be made by the
19 COML in accordance with the ICS-205.

20

21 Some military units have aviation VHF-FM radios compatible with civilian
22 systems. Other units must be provided VHF-FM radios prior to dispatch to an
23 incident. Wiring harnesses and radios will be resource ordered by the incident.
24 The resource order will include a request for qualified personnel from NIICD to
25 perform the installation of the equipment. Equipment will not be sent without
26 qualified personnel to install it.