

Controlled Unclassified Information//Basic

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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 information needed for the command/control and safety of personnel and resources.

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 <https://www.nifc.gov/NIICD/documents.html>, or contact your agency Telecommunications Department or the National Interagency Fire Center Communications Duty Officer (NIFC CDO) at (208) 387-5644.

- **BLM** – *For information on BLM contracts, software, and hardware requirements and approved radios, contact the Branch of Radio Operations (FA-332) at (208) 387-5830.*

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2 In accordance with Executive Order 13556 and USDA/DOI policies and
3 guidelines, all documents with USDA/DOI frequencies that involve the safety of
4 life and property must be labeled in accordance with Department of Defense
5 (DOD) 8500E, National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) 800-53
6 and the National Archives CUI Marking Handbook v1-1.

7 Therefore, any documents containing frequency information dealing with life
8 and/or property, whose dissemination is not controlled with a password, must be
9 labeled at the top and bottom of each page with, **Controlled Unclassified**
10 **Information//Basic** and controlled as such.

11 Frequency Modulated (FM) and Amplitude Modulated (AM) frequencies are
12 approved and assigned by a designated Washington Office frequency manager
13 and managed by state and local Communications Officers. Frequencies shall not
14 be transmitted without written permission from formally appointed frequency
15 management personnel at the local, state, regional, or national level.

16 Radio interference must be reported to NIFC CDO (or COMC when assigned)
17 when adversely impacting incident communications. Minimum reporting
18 information: location, radio frequency, time and date (including interference
19 duration), and sound or source for interference.

20 Daily and Initial Attack Operational Frequency Management

21 Frequency assignments for normal daily and initial attack operations are made
22 on a permanent basis and are requested through the normal Radio Frequency
23 Authorization process from the local, state, regional or national level designated
24 frequency management personnel.

25 Air operations initial attack frequencies, both AM and FM, are assigned by the
26 FAA and departmental frequency managers. These interagency assignments are
27 coordinated with the Geographic Area Coordination Centers (GACCs) by the
28 NIICD CDO.

29 Mutual Aid Frequency Management

30 Mutual aid frequency sharing agreements can be made at the local level.
31 Agreements are only approved in the specific location where assigned.

32 Prohibited:

- 33 • Use of mutual-aid-frequency outside assigned area; and
- 34 • Formal agreements for mutual-aid using NIFC National Fire Frequencies.

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1 Exception:

- 2 • Agency with Radio Frequency Authorization (RFA) approved by National
3 Telecommunications Information Agency (NTIA) for frequency in NIFC
4 Channeling Plan; notification and coordination with NIFC CDO required.

5 **Incident Frequency Management**

6 National level coordination and assignments of incident frequencies is the
7 responsibility of the National Interagency Incident Communications Division
8 (NIICD) and is performed by the NIFC CDO.

9 When communications requirements exceed normal operations, the NIFC CDO
10 may request that GACCs assign a Communication Coordinator (COMC) to
11 facilitate geographic area frequency management. Additional information is in
12 the *National Interagency Mobilization Guide*.

- 13 • Frequencies for Type 1 and 2 incidents are assigned by the NIFC CDO and
14 are managed by a qualified Communications Unit Leader (COML). The
15 COML will request, assign, and report all frequencies used on the incident
16 to the NIFC CDO/COMC. This will include the request and assignment of
17 all aircraft frequencies. Frequency use will be documented on the ICS-205
18 (Incident Radio Communications Plan) and on ICS-220 (Air Operation
19 Summary) forms. These completed forms will be made available to incident
20 personnel in the Incident Action Plan (IAP).
- 21 • Type 3 incidents, or other incidents that do not have an assigned COML,
22 will coordinate and request all frequency and communication equipment
23 needs through the COMC and/or the NIFC CDO.

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

26 Additional frequencies may be available on a temporary basis, and may be
27 requested by the NIFC CDO from the Washington Office Spectrum managers
28 when:

- 29 • The NIICD national frequencies are all committed within a specific
30 geographic area; and/or
- 31 • New incidents within a complex create a need for additional frequencies;
32 and/or
- 33 • The fire danger rating is extreme and the potential for additional new
34 incidents is high; and/or
- 35 • There is frequency congestion due to incidents in close proximity.

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- 2 • Air-to-Air initial attack – AM frequencies are assigned yearly to the
3 GACCs by the NIFC CDO in coordination with the Federal Aviation
4 Administration (FAA). Once assigned to the zones, management of those
5 frequencies is the responsibility of the GACC. Frequencies allocated to
6 zones for initial attack are not to be dedicated for project fire use. If
7 additional frequencies are required, they must be requested from and
8 assigned by the NIFC CDO.
- 9 • Air-to-Ground – FM frequencies will be assigned by agency frequency
10 managers and coordinated by the NIFC CDO.

11 Both AM and FM aviation frequency assignments will be used on an
12 interagency basis and a master record of these assignments is maintained by the
13 NIFC CDO. Updated frequency information is coordinated annually with the
14 GACCs.

15 Pre-assigned National Frequencies**16 National Air Guard Frequency (168.6250 MHz)**

17 A National Interagency Air Guard frequency will be used for emergency
18 aviation communications. Continuous monitoring of this frequency is mandatory
19 by agency dispatch centers and aircraft. A Continuous Tone Coded Squelch
20 System (CTCSS) tone of 110.9 Hz must be used when transmitting on the
21 National Air Guard Frequency. This frequency must be programmed into the
22 last channel of every group in fire handheld radios.

23 This frequency, 168.6250 MHz is only used for:

- 24 • Air-to-air emergency contact and coordination;
- 25 • Ground-to-air emergency contact; and
- 26 • Initial call, recall, and re-direction of aircraft when no other contact
27 frequency is available.

28 National Flight Following Frequency (168.6500 MHz)

29 The National Flight Following Frequency is used to monitor interagency and
30 contract aircraft. All aircraft on point-to-point or mission flights should
31 establish/terminate flight following, and confirm Automated Flight Following
32 (AFF) on the National Flight Following frequency.

33 The National Flight Following frequency is to be used for flight following,
34 dispatch, or redirection of aircraft. No other use is authorized.

35 All dispatch centers/offices will monitor the national flight following frequency
36 at all times. A CTCSS tone of 110.9 must be used when transmitting and
37 receiving on the National Flight Following frequency.

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- 3 • Frequencies used to support air-to-air or ground-to-air communications on
- 4 incidents west of the 95th meridian.
- 5 • Used for air-to-air and ground-to-air communications only.
- 6 • Aircraft radio transmitter power output limit: 10 watts.
- 7 ○ Prohibited:
- 8 ▪ Use as ground tactical operational channel
- 9 ▪ Use in base station and/or repeater

10 These frequencies will be assigned by the NIFC CDO or in coordination with
11 the local unit if a NTIA-RFA is approved.

12 National Interagency Airtanker Base Frequencies

13 The National Interagency airtanker base frequencies are engineered and
14 assigned by the FAA frequency managers on a yearly basis. Each frequency is
15 restricted to a service volume of a 40 nautical mile radius and 10,000 feet mean
16 sea level (MSL) or 5,000 feet above ground level (AGL) from the specified
17 latitude and longitude of the airtanker base as annotated in the National
18 Airtanker Base Directory. NO other frequencies are authorized for this use.

19 Smokejumper and Rappel/RADS Air-to-Ground Frequency (168.5500 MHz)

21 Assigned to Smokejumpers for DOI, USDA and other agencies. Specifically
22 dedicated as a smokejumper national air-to-ground tactical channel. Secondary
23 use is authorized for BLM and USFS Rappel/rope Assisted Delivery System
24 (RADS) aerial delivery operations. Channel must be toned on both transmit and
25 receive for all smokejumper and RADS teams to insure that interference issues
26 are avoided. Smokejumpers will use tone 123.0 and RADS will use 110.9. Use
27 of this frequency other than for the delivery of aerial firefighters is prohibited.

28 Government-wide Area Common User Frequencies (163.1000 MHz, 168.3500 MHz)

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

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

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Controlled Unclassified Information//Basic**1 National Interagency Fire Tactical Frequencies (168.0500 MHz, 168.2000 MHz, 168.6000 MHz, 168.2500 MHz, 166.7250 MHz, 166.7750 MHz)**

3 These shared frequencies are approved for ground tactical operations (line of
4 sight) on incidents.

5 Prohibited Use:

- 6 • Air-to-air communications; and
- 7 • Air-to-ground communications.

8 Permission to use these frequencies requires prior approval from the NIFC CDO
9 (or COMC when mobilized).

10 Incident Radio Support

11 All National Incident Radio Support Cache (NIRSC) communications
12 equipment will be returned to NIFC immediately after the incident is turned over
13 to the local jurisdictional agency unless otherwise coordinated with the NIICD
14 CDO/COMC.

15 No NIRSC communications equipment shall be moved from one incident to
16 another without being first returned to NIRSC for refurbishment. Unused and
17 sealed equipment may be moved, but only upon approval of the NIFC CDO or
18 COMC.

19 Military Communications on an Incident

20 Military units assigned to an incident are provided NIRSC communications
21 equipment. Each battalion is typically assigned 80 handheld radios. Intercrew
22 communications within a military unit is provided by the military on their radios
23 and frequencies. All incident frequencies are assigned by the COML using form
24 ICS-205.

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

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