

CALIFORNIA WILDLAND FIRE COORDINATING GROUP



SAFETY ALERT

August 22, 2011

SUBJECT: IMMEDIATE RADIO COMMUNICATION CHANGES

AREA of CONCERN:

1. Incident operations utilizing Cal FIRE Tone protected Tactical (Tac) Channels.
2. Cal EMA frequency name changes for the White Fire channels.
3. Bendix King, "EPH" series radios are only capable of 14 channels.

DISTRIBUTION: All Firefighters

DISCUSSION: Due to recent radio frequency changes in the California communication system, some firefighters are unable to communicate while working on CAL FIRE incidents.

CAL FIRE has completed narrow banding and tone-protection of Command, Local, and Tactical nets in Base, Aircraft, Mobile and Portable radios. All agencies utilizing CAL FIRE frequencies must have the correct frequencies and the appropriate tones programmed into their radios.

Once a CAL FIRE incident transitions into extended attack, the assigned **Air-to-Ground frequency may change to a TAC Channel**. All CAL FIRE tactical channels are now tone protected with CTCSS tone 192.8 (Tone 16) on both TX/RX.

Now that radio communication changes are completed and operational, all firefighters need to be aware of these changes in order to maintain reliable communications on emergency incidents.

CURRENT CHANGES:

1. **Cal EMA Fire Rescue Division Channel Name Changes** – Specific details are available in the revised Cal EMA Bulletin #28 available from Cal EMA. The channel names for WHITE 2 & WHITE 3 have been changed to meet the new national standard for common channel nomenclature.

WHITE FIRE 2 is now identified as VFIRE 22.

WHITE FIRE 3 is now identified as VFIRE 23.

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2. CAL FIRE Communication Changes:

COMMAND NET 1 & 2 are not tone protected.
COMMAND NET 3 – 10 use RX CTCSS tone 103.5 (Tone 8).
Local nets require a distinct RX CTCSS tone.
Tactical nets all use TX/RX CTCSS tone 192.8 (Tone 16).
Air Tactical nets are NOT tone protected.

Excerpt from CAL FIRE SAFETY STAND DOWN 2011-1 – Radio Communication Changes:

CAL FIRE personnel have been instructed to operate in the carrier squelch “monitor” mode whenever communicating with cooperators or other CAL FIRE resources that have not been converted. This assures all users will hear and be heard. (See attachment)

MITIGATION MEASURES:

1. If communications are being compromised, assess the risk and reference the Incident Response Pocket Guide, page 17 on “How to Properly Refuse Risk”, until communications can be established.
2. Request all units to hold a “Tail Gate Safety Session” to take place by August 25 or as soon as this SAFETY ALERT is received to assure all firefighters are briefed.
3. Review the four documents located on the FIRESCOPE Communications website:
 - A. CAL Fire Radio Communications Changes for 2011
<http://www.firescope.org/specialist-groups/communications/downloads/CAL%20FIRE%20Radio%20Communication%20Changes%202011-1.pdf>
 - B. Continuous Tone Coded Squelch System (CTCSS) Tone Protection
<http://www.firescope.org/specialist-groups/communications/downloads/ctcss-tone-protection.pdf>
 - C. Narrow banding Safety Bulletin June 2011
<http://www.firescope.org/specialist-groups/communications/downloads/Narrowbanding%20Safety%20Bulletin%20May%202011-1.pdf>
 - D. OPERATIONS BULLETIN #28 – White Fire and VFIRE Frequencies – Radio Communications
<http://www.firescope.org/specialist-groups/communications/downloads/CALEMA-%20Channel-Op-Bulletin.pdf>

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4. Educate all firefighters of the changes made to the California radio communication system.
 - A. A separate CAL FIRE TAC Group could be created on the King E series radios, with tone 16 programmed to each TAC channel in the group
 - B. Radios should be cloned at CAL FIRE Large Incidents where a Communication Unit Leader is provided, instead of manually programming.
 - C. When responding to a CAL FIRE initial attack incident, responding resources should advise dispatch that "Resource XXX, does not have Tone 16 Programmed. Dispatch will notify CAL FIRE that resources responding do not have radios with Tone 16 capability.
 - D. As soon as possible all radios should be programmed to include the new CAL FIRE TAC channels and mutual aid channel name changes.
 - E. This Safety Alert should be part of the initial in-briefing to out of region resources

**When in doubt, verify the correct frequency and tone.
L, Communications, E, S**

/s/Willie R. Thompson
Chair CWCG

Attachments:

- A. CAL Fire Radio Communications Changes for 2011
- B. Continuous Tone Coded Squelch System (CTCSS) Tone Protection
- C. Narrow banding Safety Bulletin June 2011
- D. OPERATIONS BULLETIN #28 – White Fire and VFIRE Frequencies – Radio Communications