



# Interagency Aviation Safety Alert



No. IASA 12-03

August 17, 2012

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**Subject:** Aviation Radio Frequencies  
**Area of Concern:** All Incident Management Team Air Operations  
**Distribution:** All Aviation Operations

**ISSUE:** The demand for aviation radio frequencies is exceeding the available supply in various geographic areas. The NIFC National Interagency Incident Communications Division (NIICD), Communications Duty Officer (CDO) is often unable to fill some requests due to the limited availability of frequencies within a specific area. Unfortunately, this may also result from mismanagement of these resources as there have been several incidents where there were more air frequencies than aircraft on the incident. Lack of an appropriate number of frequencies available to aviation assets is a significant safety issue that must be addressed through improved management of existing frequencies/resources.

**DISCUSSION:** The NIICD/CDO is responsible for obtaining all frequencies for initial attack and project fires throughout the nation. Some quick facts that illustrate their challenge with this year's optempo include:

- 1) The FAA has assigned more than sixty percent of their frequency allocation in support of wildland fire this year alone.
- 2) There are currently 84 initial attack communications zones west of the Mississippi requiring FAA supported frequencies.
- 3) The USDA and DOI frequency managers also provide additional VHF FM frequencies for air-to-ground support in these zones.
- 4) When Type I and II Incident Management Teams (IMTs) are assigned, additional AM and FM frequencies are provided in order to adequately support their size and complexity.
- 5) Some IMTs are preordering many frequencies prior to their arrival without properly assessing the true operational requirement and consideration of the negative impact on others.

Additional strains are placed the system when teams also request an additional "briefing channel". These requests will no longer be filled due to limited frequency availability and the negative impact placed on the CDOs ability to support new project fires within that immediate area.

**RECOMMENDATION:** All incident managers need to become aware of the limitations associated with these resources and improve their utilization. In order to support all emerging incidents, NIFC will limit the number of frequencies being filled on preorders to one Air-to-Air AM and one Air-to-Ground FM frequency. Additional air frequency requests from the Communication Unit Leader/Air Operations Branch Director will be considered once the team arrives at the incident and properly assesses the frequency requirements for that particular operation.

**CONTACT:** Questions or concerns should be forwarded to the NIFC/NIICD/CDO Coordinator Garold (Gary) Stewart at 208-387-5718 or the on Duty CDO at 208-387-5644.

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