



FIRESCOPE COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST GROUP

January 28-29, 2009
DGS-Telecommunications, Sacramento
APPROVED MINUTES

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Tim McClelland presided over the meeting. Vice-Chair Peter Lawrence was in attendance.

Members in Attendance:

Chet Ashbaugh	Telecom. Manager	Riverside County Fire
David Bail	Telecom. Mtce. Sup.	State of CA—DGS Telecom
Kody Kerwin	Telecom. Specialist	Contra Costa County Fire Chiefs Assc.
Frank McCarthy	Captain	Los Angeles County Fire (<i>no alternate designated</i>)
Steve Hobbs	Captain	Santa Barbara County Fire
Peter Lawrence	Battalion Chief	Oceanside Fire
George Lowry	Assistant Chief	State of CA – OES Telecom
Tim McClelland	Assistant Chief	State of CA – CDF San Bernardino
Matt Nielsen	Captain/COML	San Diego Fire-Rescue
Geoff Pemberton	Captain/COML	Riverside County Fire (<i>alternate to Ashbaugh</i>)
Glen Savage	Telecom. Manager	State of CA – CDF Telecommunications
Rick Smith	Captain/COML	Santa Maria Fire (<i>alternate to Hobbs</i>)
Don Stabler	CFCA Com Chair-N	CA Fire Chiefs Assoc. Comm – North
Hampton Stewart	Frequency Coordinator	State of CA – CDF (<i>alt. to Savage</i>) (<i>audio bridge on day 2</i>)
Don Turos	Telecom. Director	State of CA – National Guard (North)
Kevin Harper	Captain	Kern County Fire (<i>no alternate designated</i>)
John Moulder	CDO Coordinator	National Interagency Fire Center – Boise
Gary Stewart	CDO Coordinator	National Interagency Fire Center – Boise (<i>alt to Moulder</i>)
David Paschke	Battalion Chief	Orange County Fire Authority
Eric Martinez	Radio Pgm Mgr. /COML	United States Forest Service
Rich Gonzales		Ventura County Fire Department
Charles Dahlen		Lake Shasta City FD
Ian Wallace	Fire Captain	Santa Clara County Fire

Guests in Attendance:

Paul Clay	Technical Trainer	State of CA – DGS Telecommunications
Sam Lafferty	Telecom. Supervisor	State of CA – DGS Telecommunications
Jim Veil		Sac Metro Fire

Members Absent:

Kevin Nida	Battalion Chief	Los Angeles City Fire
Tim Henry	Battalion Chief	Fresno City Fire (<i>alternate absent</i>)
Lee Kraft	Captain	Clovis Fire (<i>alternate absent</i>)
Sal Santangelo	Sergeant Major	State of CA - Army National Guard (South)
Don Root		San Diego County RCS

FIREScope Communications Specialist Group (FCSG) Logistics

Approval of December FCSG minutes – (Approved via the group hub after the Dec mtg.)

Introductions

DGS welcomed the group to Sacramento and thanked the group for their work on Communications issues.

Brent Finster was thanked for all of the work that he has done in the past to keep this group running.

FCSG Roster

Roster was reviewed with the group. The Chair has asked that he be reminded to follow-up with the TF Liaison on the status of the LFD representative. Updated rosters will be emailed out to the group. Any changes should be emailed to kkerw@cccfd.org.

Task Force Meeting

Met last week at the annual joint meeting with the Ops team. TF and Ops Team held elections. This year, Chair of TF is Dave Stone. Dan Drake is the Vice Chair. Dave Pierce stayed as the Ops Team Chair and Vice Chair is Mario Rueda from LFD. Dave Stone will not be with com group after this meeting. Michael LaPlant from VNC will be the new CSG representative from the Task Force. Dan Drake will continue to assist. Chief Stone thanked the group for the work we have done under his tenure.

The 205 revision and 217 revisions have been posted to the website. 217A has not got to the TF yet. We need to send it to Chief Stone. Frank McCarthy identified that he was at a NIMS meeting in Boise and the decision was made to have the official forms on the website and that if the end user wanted to modify it, then they could. ROSS has been updated to a faster server. The BOD is updating the MACS process. There is a meeting scheduled for next month. NIMS FOG and NIMS forms and decision making process out for public comment now before finalization. You can review and comment at www.NIMSONline.gov.

Working on WT and engine typing issue to try and get FIREScope to line up with NWCG. Predictive services gave a presentation on Red Flag and the criteria used by NWS as opposed to FIREScope. There is a need to adjust the Red Flag criteria to account for the fuels component. This is a staffing and expenditure issue.

Agency Updates

CALEMA - George Lowry.

On going transition from individual departments to the single agency. New email addresses will be forthcoming. There is no change to Chief of Fire and Rescue Branch. Per George Lowry, there should be no need for any changes to licensing. Current plan is to bring DGS-Telecom into CALEMA to create a single information technology entity. State CIO will supervise the operation.

There was discussion on licensing of CESRS; CalEMA wants to create a database of users to document the need for a statewide travel frequency. DGS was requesting a formal process to identify users so that it was known who was using the frequency. DGS does understand the need to get this done quickly, but prefers a written agreement with each user. Continued use of CESRS as a travel net appears to be a CALEMA (OES) decision and not DGS decision.

CALFIRE. Glen Savage.

The narrow-banding of all CALFIRE frequencies has been pushed out to the end of 2010 (*see attachment B*). This is in conflict with the recent decision made by the BOD to have all frequencies NB by January 2010. A recommendation was made to discuss the possibility of trying to get the BOD to revise their transition date for the White Fire frequencies to meet with the other statewide frequency NB process. CALFIRE needs to NB in order to try and access some of the interstitial channels and cannot wait until 2013.

CALFIRE is looking at about 4 months to complete the NB programming process. They have started in the middle of the state and are working outwards. They have changed the tone scheme in all of their mountaintops to utilize all 16 tones. This has reduced the frequency interference in the central valley. New radio call plan with the latest tone changes will be out in March. Received a grant to buy and build out a mobile command center. It will be a type I MCC on a commercial cab and chassis. It will have 4-800 MHz radios in it. It must be delivered and operational by March 2010. A new ECC training building will be constructed at Lone by June. There will be additional enhancements at Lone over the next two years. Alan Columbro is now working as a Retired Annuitant in the central sierra/MEU/SLU doing communications work for Glen. FKU is changing their designator to FSU.

DGS.

Question was raised on the NB status of all state frequencies. The date is still the end of 2013 according to DGS. DGS wants them to convert as quickly as possible, but NLT 2013. However, after 2011 the manufacturers are supposed to stop selling equipment that is capable of operating at 25 kHz, so any new equipment purchased as of that date will not be able to operate on the WB frequencies. This could create problems for agencies that wait until the last minute.

Paul Clay provided an update on the DGS-T program. They are working towards a credential to meet the "RED CARD" requirements for DGS-T personnel. There will be six recertification classes this year. There are 42 individuals currently certified with a goal of reaching 50. Training will take place in Visalia. All COML personnel will be invited to attend in order to become familiar with the DGS-T personnel.

All consoles in State MCC's will be replaced with new units. There is movement to modify the response staffing on the OASIS units to provide paid staffing instead of the current volunteer operators. There will be six OASIS trailers by this fire season. There are also six gateway trucks with OASIS on board that will allow for 12 deployable units from CALEMA.

NIFC/NIICD. John Moulder

John introduced Gary Stewart, who will be John's alternate on the working group. Gary Stewart is currently a COMC in the fire center as well as a past COML on a National Incident Management Team. He has some good operational back ground in incident communications.

NIFC operations personnel have been divided up to represent each GACC. Gary has been assigned to represent North OPS, South OPS, Western Great Basin and the Eastern Great Basin GACC's.

NIFC is trying to improve the availability of frequencies and repeaters for this year's fire season and will have a new frequency scheme for this coming season. The standard Command C1-C5 repeaters will be paired with C8-C12. C1 will be paired with C8, C2 with C9, etc. C6 and C7 are assignable as either a new command or in concert with the new pairings. This will allow the COMC and COML to have a pre-identified secondary command frequency to plan for (and put on the 205) if they anticipate a need for an additional repeater for their fire. This should help with system configuration and documentation at the incident.

NIFC/NIICD (Cont'd)

Eric Martinez asked what the status of getting a laptop kits to all the COML's for programming, John Molder advised that they have not been built up. NIFC is working on a "Thin Net" for a camp network which will provide the connectivity to a server. This will help the incident information stay at the incident between IMT's transitions. This is an ongoing project and John will keep us updated on its progress. It is at least 3 yrs out before they address any communications items on this network.

They have also done a frequency search for all GACC's in order to pre-identify frequencies able to be used to supplement the established sets. There are four zones in CA. C13 + can be added to the mix. They will not be shipping two repeaters with every starter system, but will have already pre-identified the expansion in case it is needed. C11 still has interference issues in So Cal, south of the Tehachapi range, so C4 may not be assigned in that portion of SOPS, or it will be shipped with C6 or C7.

NIFC is still the single point of contact for the FAA. Pre-identified AM frequencies continue to be renewed each year, but the old process of prior wide area assignments in advance of the fires will no longer be allowed. NIFC is required to go to the FAA for each fire to request frequencies. The FAA is reducing regions from 9 regions to 3 regions, causing additional staffing and coordination issues. Therefore, COML personnel need work with the COMC assigned to their incident in a timely manner to get the AM frequencies if they are needed on an expanding incident.

123.975 for the air tanker bases is a temporary assignment and it has been reassigned in some areas by the FAA. NIFC is working to renew all of the licenses and preclude other assignees. There is no current move to acquire new NB AM frequencies, but some interstitial frequencies will become available with the NB process. The IA process has been impacted by all of the frequency changes and there has been little coordination amongst the various federal frequency coordinators and states with this issue. NIFC has been tasked to coordinate these frequencies, not on licensing, but coordination with the regions. They just completed the PNW zones (OR, WA).

There is a movement to tone protect the NIFC frequencies due to the continued interference and close proximity of incidents. The CMD RPTR receiver can be tone protected, which will help reduce the incident to incident interference but there is an equipment and safety issue with tone protecting the transmit side of the CMD RPTR and slaving it to the receive of the portable radios. It was identified that putting a CTCSS on RX of tactical channels is not a "good practice" due to the safety concerns from an operational perspective. This generated good discussion with the group and needs to have continued discussion at the next meeting.

NIFC is also looking to tone protect the A/G frequencies to allow more use in close proximity of incidents. Part way through the last season, NIFC was notified that their aircraft kit was overweight and that the air freight companies would not ship it, so they had to use cardboard boxes for a short period of time. This has been rectified and some kits are now in fiberglass boxes.

7390 kits are no longer in service in CA. They have all been converted to 4390's with 4 in RDD and 4 in ONT. The pre-position kits will be backfilled once a kit is sent to a fire.

There were issues last fire season with Logistics radios with active DTMF keypads. There would be a delay in transmissions when the DTMF tones were accidentally activated. NIFC has spent the past winter eliminating the hot keypad DTMF function. EPH radios are still in the kits, so you may get some into your fires. NIFC is checking into the issue of the UHF logistics radios going off frequency when exposed to high temps and long usage. No more EF Johnson radios are in the NIFC cache, but are with DHS.

USFS. Martinez

The USFS has gone through another transition to a Chief Information Officer (CIO) process. Each state has several zones and is then broken up into areas. PSW2 is the southern 7 forests, the ONT cache plus fire lab. If you need local tech support, you can go through the CDO at the GACC. This is for immediate need (IA) support and each forest is required to provide it. However, there are only 7 techs in the PSW2 area.

All infrastructure equipment being currently installed is P25 compliant and is being standardized. So Cal equipment is being configured for VoIP. Dispatch nets are all going to the IP controlled method and T-1 and microwave are being eliminated. This could be an issue in a natural disaster. National Flight following is being tone protected at 100.9 both TX and Rx.

CALSIEC Fire Working Group

Chief John Penido (on 1-29-09 via Conference Bridge). Representing CFCA and is the current Chair of CALSIEC. Thanked the members for the technical assistance to him as well as the day to day role we play in the fire service. He met with the FIRESCOPE BOD earlier this year to seek a representative for the new membership roster for CALSIEC. As reported in the December minutes, the CALSIEC membership has been reduced from 48 to 19. Representing the Fire Service is the FIRESCOPE BOD, along with CFCA, CAL Fire and CalEMA Fire and Rescue. The CSG retains the role as the technical advisors to the BOD representative (Doug Barry-LAC). The vision for CALSIEC is that the majority of the work is done at the Regional Planning Area (RPA) level and brought upwards to CALSIEC. It will be reviewed at a technical level first and then moved to the whole CALSIEC Executive Board. Chief Penido requests the FIRESCOPE CSG members continue to work with their RPA's to identify and resolve interoperability issues at the regional level. Chief Penido will be briefing Chief Barry on February 2nd. Chief Penido asked for CSG attendance at each RPA and each CALSIEC meeting. More information is available on the CALSIEC website www.calsiec.org

New Business

Proposed Group 3 in CALFIRE Load (Savage) Group 4 has been eliminated and combined with group 3. TOF was changed to HTF and will move to channel 75. KRN 1 has been NB for this fire season. All KRN channels are NB this year including tactical channels (see attachment B). Local units will have 91 channels available for their individual frequency loads in the TK-790 this year.

FCSG Technical Advisory Group (CTAG) - No issues have been brought forward to the group via email or website.

FCSG Training Group (COMMTRAIN). - Attendance at the Cal Chiefs meeting was down on the communications side. Some good guest speakers were there. There was a presentation on ROSS, OES F+R, Incident Dispatcher and NIMS COML. June 23-25 will be the annual fire training exercises in Contra Costa County. Approximately 40 dispatchers will undergo refresher training. If you have INCD or COML personnel needing refresher training, contact CON.

Channel Advisory Group (CAG) - Priority 4 channels (Hobbs). - The letter to all operational areas (OA) from OES did go out on 12-12-08. Steve has already received 12 or 13 responses. April 13 is the cut off for responses back to Steve. The frequencies will then be reviewed by Lawrence and Hobbs.

Review of Web Content. - Need to provide a copy of the 205-T to the T/F rep for submission to CalEMA for FIRESCOPE web site. The charter reviewed without changes. The work plan was updated for 2009 and will be sent to the T/F Liaison shortly by the new Secretary.

CESRS - Glen Savage and George Lowry
Some tone protection is being established on mountaintops, but CESRS is still in simplex mode.

Comm Conference - This will be held in conjunction with the NAPCO conference in San Ramon the 3rd week of December 2009.

Narrowband Migration Plan - To be updated and placed on the FIRESCOPE website

Mexican Interference Issues – There is a working group committee that has been established to address interference issues in Southern California. It is chaired by the DHS and it consists of Federal representatives, as well as state and local reps from the bordering states. It is being hosted by Don Root (SD County RCS) and Glen Nash (CA-DGS T-Comm). Glen Savage attended the last SW Border meeting in SD and advised it was a good meeting. Glen Nash provided an update and overview of the group. It is an open forum to talk about communication issues and upcoming projects. The majority of the discussions are oriented to Law Enforcement, not by intent, but by participants. DOI does attend. The group acts as a liaison to the High Level Communications Committee which is a US Department of State committee concerning cross border issues. There has been progress on a formal agreement with Mexico concerning Federal frequencies, but no anticipation of a solution for state and local frequency coordination/interference issues. There is a movement to install gateways at selected border crossing locations in order to link with Mexican agencies. In order to use these gateways, you need to be able to deliver a signal to the DHS/ICE station with the gateway and then have an agreement with the entities on the other side of the border you need to communicate with.

The next SW Border meeting is Feb 24 and 25 in San Diego. (The meetings last 8 hrs each day). John Duffy is the contact with SD County SO. RSVP to Peter Yochum (peter.yochum@associates.dhs.gov).

Interagency Incident Management Team Workshop - The CAIIMT team meetings will be held on April 7-9, 2009 in Reno, NV at the Silver Legacy Resort. Registration deadline is March 19th. You can register online @ www.fs.fed.us/r5/fire/ciimt_workshop. There will be a communications breakout on April 8th with a conference bridge for those who are unable to attend in person. (Time TBD)

The National Logistics workshop is now held every other year and will be held in spring of 2010, location TBD.

Air Operations Issues - no updates or issues noted due to any air operations people in attendance.

Outstanding issues from 2008 Fire Season - Jim Veil (Sac Metro Fire) noted on one fire they received Datron radios and the SOFR felt it was a problem to issues radios that most people had not seen. The SOFR required the COML to do training on the radio before issuing the radios. NIFC does not pay attention to the type of radio when putting a starter kit together. However, once a type of radio is issued, NIFC will try to keep the same radio type for subsequent orders depending on resource availability. NIFC will add additional pocket cards to the kits to address the training/familiarization issue. COML and COMT personnel need to know where to find the reference materials for each radio on line (www.hotsheet.nifc.gov). Matt Nielson will be putting together a refresher document that will address this issue.

S258 and S358 Course Presentation Issue - Frank McCarthy spoke with Susan Bleeg at NIFC. She is the training coordinator for NIFC. She has identified available training opportunities in April and May for a COML and COMT class to be taught in CA. The COML class will cost \$350 per person to take the course. For COMT, the cost may vary but it could cost up to \$850 (per person) for a 24 person class due to the cost of shipping the cache equipment to and from the training site, plus the cost of rehabbing the equipment when it is returned to NIFC. Additional costs are for instructor's costs and per diem. NIFC has a position in the GACC's called "GATOR" (Geographical Area Training Coordinators) to assist with the training issues between NIFC and CA. The GACC trainers need to be contacted as soon as an agency sets its training schedule for the year and needs NIFC support for those classes. S358 course curriculum will be available the May / June time frame. It is currently at the printers for final printing.

NIFC still requires a \$500,000 deposit to get the equipment shipped to non federal agencies for a COMT class. This topic is being discussed at NIFC in order to determine if any other options exist.

Nominations should be in to NIFC by November so the class numbers and reimbursable costs can all be accounted for. Matt Nielsen suggested that we try and establish the need for courses by March for the following year (dates and locations). Need to include this as an action item for March. OCFA offered their facility free of charge if needed for a training location.

Chris Suter with DHS NIMS COML Instructor cadre gave an update (via 01/29 Conference Bridge) on the new NIMS S-358. All Risk COML is due for publication shortly. There was some discussion on the all risk COML scope of intent. Chris mentioned that this is an agency certification and is not qualifying an individual to work on T1/T2 Wildland incidents. This class will be receiving a DHS course number shortly and CalEMA will be funding classes statewide using grant funds once that happens. The task book is "similar in nature" to the NWCG task book, but the class is aimed at an all risk T3 incident. Train the trainer materials will be out shortly.

There was a lengthy discussion on changing the Communications Unit to a Section Chief level. A Subcommittee report was presented by Don Stabler to the group with a "draft" recommendation to change the current NWCG ICS Communications Unit structure. It showed how the communications unit could benefit from having "Section Chief" representation due to increased work load due to incident complexity becoming more common. It was recommended by Chief McClelland that the subcommittee talk with Eric Martinez with the USFS at the ISO (PSW Comm. 2) regarding the rewrite/changes. It was also mentioned that DHS is looking towards elevating communications section to have representation on the command and general staff level.

The COMMTRAIN subcommittee will refine the presentation and understands that this will need to go to the T/F before we start working with outside agencies. It was recommended that the COML's with the CSG take the org chart to incidents this next fire season and show it to people in order to get their input. This will continue as an action item at the scheduled meetings until the presentation is ready for submission to the T/F. It was requested that the PPT be posted to the group-hub.

420-1 (Appendix A to the FOG) - Changes were made to the current Appendix A and will be sent to the Task Force Liaison for review and inclusion in the next edition of the FOG.

Multi-Band Radios - The County of Riverside has ordered 1500 multi-band radios configured for VHF, 700 and 800 MHz. There was a discussion on the potential use of these radios on fires. There was some concern about users receiving traffic on different bands and then missing fire traffic on VHF. It is anticipated they will be using the new radios in approximately 18 months. It was also mentioned that Kody Kerwin with Contra Costa Fire is chair of a UASI (Urban Area Security Initiative) in the Bay Area to work with public safety agencies to identify how these multi band radios will effect communications and interoperability. There are multiple radio vendors that are providing these radios and to public safety agencies in CA and we have a good chance of seeing them on incidents this year. It was recommended that communication personnel start becoming aware of what is out there.

Multi-Agency Frequency Planning a joint effort of SOPS, ORC, RVC, Cal Fire and LAC. The agencies in the 91/57 freeway corridors have met to discuss common frequency planning. ORC will be dispatching their SRA/FRA incidents with VHF frequencies. A 16 channel frequency plan that includes the relevant Cal Fire, USFS, and White, VTac, ORC and LAC VHF frequencies for these areas has been developed. Concern was expressed to the ORC representative concerning the lack of either an adequate number of portable radios or at least one mobile and portable radio on all of their Wildland units. If the goal is to move the incident to VHF at time of dispatch, then all dispatched units need to have an adequate VHF capability. The San Diego County Mutual Threat Zone committee is dealing with the same issues with Camp Pendleton (MCP), CNF and MVU. A frequency plan for fires on MCP has been developed and the designated command channel placed in the statewide frequency load.

IAFF/USFA Comm. Guide – Pete Lawrence spoke to the group about the new release of “Voice Radio Communications Guide for the Fire Service”. It has some very good information on current technology, basic user terminology and recommendations on how the fire service uses radios. The link to the guide will be sent to all members for review in advance of the next meeting. It was recommended that we reach out and make contact with USFA and communicate that we are interested in assigning a representative from FCSG to work with them and IAFF on the next update. No one was identified to take the lead on this task.

Qualifications for COML and COMT - Matt Nielsen provided a draft memo to NWCG with suggestions to require the completion of the S258 and S358 courses before becoming a trainee in each position. Concern was expressed that this required people to take classes that were very expensive and not readily available locally. Concern was also expressed by DGS that their combined 258/358 class would not qualify. Additionally, DGS has the responsibility for handling the programming/maintenance of State radios, making it difficult for CALFIRE employees to become qualified as a COMT. CALFIRE personnel cannot take the 258 class as it interferes with the state requirement that all COMT work be performed by DGS employees. The question was posed: do we want to look to a stronger standard for COML? With the T3 COML coming out, it was concerned it will become an issue in the near future. Any request to NWCG will require the recommendation to go through the T/F. This will be carried over to the May meeting.

Narrowband Date - The Communications Specialist Chair will be coordinating with the CALSIEC chair, T/F Liaison and FIREScope BOD on setting a unified date.

Elections - Elections were held and the current Chair (McClelland) and Vice-Chair (Lawrence) were reelected. Tim McClelland identified that this will probably be his last year with the group. Kody Kerwin from CON was elected to fill the vacant Secretary position.

Next Meeting:

March 24th, 0900-1200 Conference Call. CALFIRE (to provide a conference bridge)

May 6-7th Meeting at ORC HQ 1 Fire Authority Way, Irvine, CA 92602 Start May 6th at 1300 and end May 7th at 1500