



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Pacific
Northwest
Region

P.O. Box 3623
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Portland, OR 97204

File Code: 5100

Date: September 4, 2002

Subject: Unauthorized Radio and Frequency Use

To: Pacific Northwest Interagency Engine/Tender and Crew Contractors

Attached are two letters concerning radio frequency misuse and the use of unauthorized radios on Federal incidents.

The use of unassigned/unauthorized frequencies creates a direct hazard to all personnel. Contractors on federal incidents will only utilize frequencies authorized by the Incident Communication Leader, National Telecommunication Information Administration, Federal Communications Commission, Federal Aviation Administration, or those listed in the Incident Communication Plan.

The use of Family Radio Service (FRS) is governed by Part 95.191 of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Rules and Regulations. Family Radio Service units operate on an unauthorized frequency (166.666 MHZ) that is within the range reserved for Federal and State frequencies (150 – 174 MHZ).

While on Federal incidents, frequency abuse, and use of Family Radio Service units and home unit frequencies are not authorized in any case. Those units identified using unauthorized/unassigned frequencies are subject to administrative action.

/s/TERRY A. BROWN
Fire and Aviation Management
Fire Equipment Specialist

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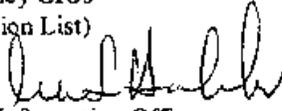
**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

Office of the Chief
Information Officer

1400 Independence
Avenue, SW

Washington, DC
20250

TO: Selected Agency CIOs
(See Distribution List)

FROM: Ira L. Hobbs 
Acting Chief Information Officer

SUBJECT: Use of Family Radio Service

The use of Family Radio Service (FRS) is governed by Part 95.191 of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Rules and Regulations. FRS radios were designed and approved to provide the general public with an inexpensive and unlicensed short-range radio service. Due to the low cost of these radios, several agencies have requested permission to conduct official business using these radios. The Department has reviewed the requests and determines that the use of FRS radios by USDA agencies to conduct official business will not be allowed.

Although FRS radios were developed for use by the general public, they are susceptible to high levels of interference with no recourse for correction and are not manufactured to withstand every-day use. Their use is not regulated and they operate on unlicensed frequencies.

Official radio communications should be conducted using radios that operate on radio frequencies that are reserved for use by the federal government. The radios used should be manufactured to an approved standard that will ensure that the radios will continue to operate under the normal conditions that result from daily use.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Tom Thomison, USDA Frequency Manager, on (703) 605-4570, or via email at tthomison@fs.fed.us.

Attachment



To: GACCs, MACs, ACs, ICs

Date: August 11, 2000

Subject: Frequency Misuse

Firefighter safety is being compromised and the Fire and Aviation Directors for the Department of the Interior and USDA, Forest Service will not tolerate any such actions. Crews, engines, firefighting and aircraft personnel are not adhering to assigned frequencies for use on division tactical, command, and air operations. Many are using unassigned frequencies not authorized by the Communications Unit Leaders, National Telecommunication Information Administration (NTIA), Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and operating outside of the Incident Communication Plan (ICS-205).

As an example, on August 9, 2000 a strike team of engines was operating on an unassigned frequency and the Division Group Supervisor was unable to alert them to a potential emergency fire situation that was about to overrun them. The Communications Unit Leader alerted them via the unauthorized frequency and they were able to retreat to a safe area. If they had not been notified, they might have been injured or a possible loss of life may have occurred.

The use of unassigned/unauthorized frequencies creates a direct hazard to all personnel. By placing them off of the assigned net and not following the ICS-205 Communications Plan there is no way of notifying these units in the event there is emergency traffic much less normal incident traffic.

Frequency abuse, and use of Family Radio Service units, the "Satan channel" 166.666 MHz., and home unit frequencies are not authorized in any case. Those units identified using unauthorized/unassigned frequencies are subject to administrative action.

/s/Dennis W. Pendleton
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USDA, Forest Service, NIFC

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/s/Sue Vap
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/s/Bill Baden
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National Association of State Foresters
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