



FIRESCOPE COMMUNICATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE (FCS)

January 15, 2026

To: FIRESCOPE Board of Directors Through:
FIRESCOPE Operations Team & Task Force

From: FIRESCOPE Communications Subcommittee

Subject: Legacy Bendix King Radio Phase Out

Approval: The FIRESCOPE Board of Directors approved the recommendations from this letter on January 15, 2026. **See the highlighted section below.**

The Legacy Bendix King Radio (DPH-GPH series) have reached end of life. The radios are no longer a supported platform by BK Technologies. Parts are no longer available for the radios, making repairs at incidents unavailable. Support equipment, including programming cables, is no longer available. Cal Fire has phased out Legacy Bendix King Radios and Kenwood Radios that have limited channel capacity and limited digital capabilities.

The radios are also limited in channel capacity to 400-500 channels. With the increasing number of CalFire, Federal, and local agency VHF channels, developing a comprehensive, operationally sound, statewide mutual aid channel list has become difficult due to radio channel capacity limits. The current mandatory channel load is 309 channels. The current minimum standard of 400 channels limits agency's ability to load local agency channels and the mandatory channels.

In the past, a 400-channel radio was deemed sufficient to cover the state. However, with the addition of more VFIRE and VTAC channels, as well as additional CalFire and local government Command, Tactical and Air-to-Ground VHF channels, a 400-channel radio has become insufficient for the future of the California Fire Service. Every year, a significant debate on the pros and cons of adding or deleting channels belonging to State, Federal and Local partner agencies take place. Additionally, as more channels are added to the statewide load, the ability for each agency to add their "local" load to their radio diminishes. As the mandatory load increases, this lack of channel capacity will cause agencies to individually pick and choose the statewide frequencies they wish to include in their annual load and the value of a statewide load forming the basis

for mutual aid responses begins to fall apart.

As radio capabilities evolve and radio systems are upgraded, the need for P25 digital capability is becoming necessary. Legacy analog radio systems are being replaced with P25 radio systems requiring radios capable of P25 operation. The current minimum standard does not specify P25 capability. A lack of P25 capability will ultimately limit radio systems that can be utilized and the ability to take advantage of the efficiencies of digital operation. Grant funding for radios has required P25 capability for over 10 years. Agencies are delaying implementing P25 radio systems and their advantages due to this limitation. The addition of P25 will allow Mutual Aid resources to utilize upgraded more efficient radio systems and channels and give agencies the ability to implement P25 radio systems. P25 radio systems provide more reliable communication. There are multiple P25 federal, state, and local channels on the air today (with more planned) which are unavailable for use by non-digital radios. Our CalFire and Federal cooperators have already upgraded to P25 capable radios which exceed our 400-channel minimum.

After significant debate, the FCS came to consensus that radios capability of P25 digital operation and a minimum of 1000 channels as the statewide standard is required. As such, the FCS is requesting that the FIRESCOPE Board of Directors, via the Task Force, approve the following statement for inclusion in the next revision of the MACS 441-1 FIRESCOPE Radio Communications Guidelines and have the Chief, OES Fire and Rescue, disseminate this statement to all members of the California Fire Service:

Currently, the minimum channel capacity for a radio in California is 400 channels (covers the mandatory load and local load requirements). Beginning in 2027, the required FIRESCOPE radio capability will be P25 digital capability and a minimum of 1000 channels. As such, agencies will be required to provide a mobile and portable radio in all responding units with P25 digital capability and at least 1000 channels. This information is being provided in advance to give participating agencies sufficient time to facilitate this transition.

We understand that this may cause some agencies to incur costs to replace older radios. However, we also believe that the failure to keep pace with the overall needs of the California Fire Service, and especially our robust and noteworthy mutual aid system, has a cost and impact on its own.