



FIRESCOPE COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST GROUP

JANUARY 20-21, 2005
RIVERSIDE COUNTY FIRE STATION 84 – TEMECULA, CA
MINUTES

(Final version approved for distribution)

Welcome and Introductions

Chair Tim McClelland called the meeting to order. RVC Division Chief Mike Burton welcomed the group to Temecula. Chief Stone and Chief Praytor were in attendance representing the FIRESCOPE Task Force (Chief Praytor was absent the 2nd day due to a conflict.)

Members In Attendance:

David Bail	Telecom. Mtce. Sup.	State of CA – DGS Telecommunications
Mike Burton	Division Chief	Riverside County Fire
Michael Dickerson	Comm. Supervisor	Ventura County Fire (Alternate to Sidlinger)
Brent Finster	Telecom. Manager	Contra Costa County Fire Chiefs Association
Gary Fisher	Fire Chief	Vista Fire
Mike Gunderman	Electronics Technician	USFS – F&AM – South Cache (Alternate to Harris)
Kevin Harper	Captain	Kern County Fire Department
Robert Harris	Technical Supervisor	USFS – F&AM – South Cache
Tim Henry	Battalion Chief	Fresno City Fire
Chris Hinshaw	Assistant Manager	San Diego Co. Sheriff/Imperial Valley Fire Chiefs Assoc.
Steve Hobbs	Captain	Santa Barbara County Fire
John Hudson	Asst. Chief	State of CA - OES Telecommunications
Craig Kinoshita	Battalion Chief	Orange County Fire Authority
Peter Lawrence	Battalion Chief	Oceanside Fire
Tim McClelland	Assistant Chief	State of CA - CDF South Ops
Kevin Nida	Battalion Chief	LA City Fire (present 2 nd day only)
Matt Nilsen	Captain	San Diego Fire-Rescue
William Pigeon	Firefighter/Paramedic	Barona Fire/So. California Tribal Fire
Don Root	Deputy Chief	State of CA - OES Telecommunications
Glen Savage	Telecom. Manager	State of CA - CDF Telecommunications
Rick Smith	Captain	Santa Maria Fire (Alternate to Hobbs)
Randy Terich	Battalion Chief	Vista Fire (Alternate to Fisher)

Guests in Attendance:

Arnie Lewin	ACS Officer	State of CA - OES Auxillary Comm. Svc.-Southern Reg.
-------------	-------------	--

Members Absent:

Lee Kraft	Captain	Clovis Fire
Frank McCarthy	Captain	LA County Fire
Denny Neville	Administrator	Rancho Santa Fe Fire
Tom Reaves	Fire Chief	Foster City Fire
Mike Sidlinger	Battalion Chief	Ventura County Fire (Alternate present)
Jim Swanson	Comm. Supervisor	CA Fire Chiefs Assoc. Communications - North Section
Michael Urquides	Division Chief	Salinas Rural Fire

Communications Specialist Group (CSG) Logistics

Approval of October meeting minutes - The Chair asked for any comments or corrections on the October meeting minutes. Finster stated that there was a correction needed in Annex #3 concerning the Priority 3 frequencies. Apparently, incorrect frequencies were listed in the draft minutes. A new, corrected set of minutes was distributed with the correct frequencies. The group unanimously approved the minutes, as distributed, with no changes. *<Secretary's Note: Copies of the current FIRESCOPE Channel Plans and VHF Channel Configuration will be distributed with these minutes.>*

Roster – The roster was passed around the table with the intent of validating those who were in attendance as well as capturing missing or incorrect contact information. The current, updated roster is attached to this document. *<Secretary's Note: Members should inform the Secretary of any changes and should note missing information identified by the fields highlighted in yellow. >*

CSG Membership Expansion Status – The Task Force is continuing to accept additional nominations especially from NPS, BLM, and Northern California local government agencies. Firefighter/Paramedic William Pigeon from Barona Fire Department was welcomed as a new member representing Southern California Tribal Fire Departments. Captain Rick Smith was welcomed as a new alternate member representing Santa Barbara County. Chief Praytor stated that any CSG member who has not attended any meetings in the past year, and who does not attend the next meeting in April, would be dropped from membership. In addition, Chief Praytor reminded everyone that attendance at the FIRESCOPE CSG meetings, per the disclosure during the nomination process, is the financial responsibility of the representative agency and not OES. The next meeting will be held in Northern California and there will be a concerted attempt in the future to spread the meetings throughout the state. As part of the mission of dealing with fire service interoperability, this allows members the opportunity to explore and familiarize themselves with local issues first hand. Conference call-in capability during future meetings will be considered however members should attend in person and use a conference call as a last resort.

Email List Server – Root indicated that the OES Email list server is now stable. All members and alternates will have access to the list server function immediately.

Reports

FIRESCOPE Task Force/Operations/Board of Directors – Chief Stone advised that the narrow banding briefing paper presented at the October Board of Director's meeting was excellent and well received. Special emphasis was placed on what steps the CSG had already taken in regards to the issue of interoperability such as updating FOG Appendix A in April and June, minimum channel recommendations for California Fire Service radios, participation in the CALSIEC effort, etc. Significant communications issues concerning interoperability remain with law enforcement and the military and this will require further discussion and action.

FIRESCOPE Communications Technical Advisory Group (CTAG) – This sub-group of members had not met and there was no report. CTAG Chair Chris Hinshaw will coordinate a conference call before the next meeting. CTAG members are Mike Burton, Don Root, Bob Harris, and Brent Finster.

OES Fire & Rescue – Chief Praytor reported on recent staff changes within OES Fire & Rescue.

OES Telecommunications – Root reported on several staff changes within OES Telecommunications.

CALSIEC – Root, who serves as Executive Secretary to CALSIEC, and Finster, who serves as one of the two FIRESCOPE representatives to CALSIEC (Nida is the other one), reported on the recent meeting held in Santa Clara County. Working groups continue to form and meet including a recent organization of regional Interoperability groups within the state.

Rules for the V-CALL and V-Tac channels are pending the formation and meetings of the Inter-Discipline Interoperability working group. Both Root and Finster have attended meetings of the CALSIEC Emergency Medical Services working group and report that they appear to be serious in developing a statewide EMS communications plan to include identification of channels for ambulance strike teams to communicate during major events. The EMS group is likely to follow FIREScope CSG models in regards to their planning and work products.

CDF COMPLAG – The Chair stated a CDF Communications Planning Group (COMPLAG) had met in Palm Desert this last November. Among the items discussed were tone protection of the CDF repeaters, a recommendation that portable radios be issued to CDF fire suppression personnel as part of their Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), working with OES on changes to the CDF Group 3 channel configuration (probably waiting until Spring 2006 before a major re-programming is necessary <Secretary's Note: This is now changed as re-programming of CDF radios prior to Fire Season 2005 is now scheduled by CDF>. Also the status of new CDF portable radio was discussed. This new contract with Silverado Avionics will provide a Bendix-King GPH radio with CDF-approved firmware modifications. In addition, all State Department of General Services radio technicians are currently undergoing fire training. Although this training is not at the level of Incident Communications Technician, it will allow DGS techs the ability to work on incidents in California with the knowledge and tools to program most radios in the field during an incident.

The next CDF COMPLAG meeting is scheduled for February 23 and 24 in Redding. For additional information on these or other CDF issues contact Tim McClelland.

USFS – Harris and Gunderman advised that for awhile things were looking better in terms of the impact on the California Fire Service caused by the re-location of the Region 5 cache to Boise. CDF and OES had sent memos requesting that NFES 4390 Starter Systems be pre-positioned in California because of the normal, consistent large fires that can occur at any time during the year. Until today, CDF and OES believed that the issue had been resolved. Harris and Gunderman indicate that the decision to leave starter systems in California was apparently unraveling, The FIREScope CSG members in attendance were very concerned about this reversal and the catastrophic impact a delay of 12 to 24 hours could mean in obtaining cache equipment.

In addition, the two-year information technology personnel study by the U.S.F.S. is now complete. There are approximately half as many USFS radio technicians in 2005 as there was in 2004. The number of USFS personnel available for response to fire incidents in California in 2005 will be significantly less.

Chief Praytor asked what it would take to replicate cache equipment if grant money was available.

Old Business

Task Force Recommendation-VHF radio standard of 240 channels minimum – Chief Stone advised that the following CSG recommendation was APPROVED by the FIREScope Task Force:

“Due to limitations of today's technology, FIREScope recommends that California Fire Service purchase VHF radios with a minimum of 240 channels.”

A memo will be prepared by the Secretary to be distributed by OES to inform fire agencies of this recommendation.

Basic Radio Training Resources - Nilsen indicated he is still collecting information to be compiled and put up on the FIREScope web site that will provide training curriculum for most of the recommended basic annual hours with the rest of the time allotted for agency-specific training. In addition, there will be curriculum and lesson plans on other ICS Communications Unit Positions (e.g. RADO, INCM, etc.)

Task Force Recommendation-Basic radio training – Chief Stone advised that the following CSG recommendation was approved by the FIREScope Task Force:

“FIRESCOPE recommends the establishment of a minimum of 4 hours of annual basic radio training for the DIVS, STEN, and single resource boss positions.”

FIRESCOPE Channel Plan – Priority 4 Channels – The OES memo soliciting radio frequency information that could be compiled into a list of Priority 4 channels was distributed as planned. Emphasis was to obtain a list of mutual aid and gateway channels that may be part of an Operational Area or regional plan and, secondarily, dispatch and tactical channels that might be utilized during major events within that jurisdiction.

The due date for submittals as published in the OES memo was January 7th. As of this date, approximately 1/3rd of the state’s Operational Areas have responded. A second memo will be distributed in the coming month with the intent of having the submittals ready for discussion at the next FIRESCOPE CSG meeting.

There was much discussion regarding how frequency usage authorizations would be handled. It was decided that a formal process using a cooperative combination of local agency/Operational Area/OES Region/FIRESCOPE layers made the most sense. A Cooperative Agreement Sub-group consisting of Tim Henry, Glen Savage, David Bail and William Pigeon would research and make recommendations regarding frequency usage agreements *(Secretary’s note – this paragraph has been corrected based on a revision to the minutes at the April 26, 2005 meeting.)*

Task Force Recommendation - Procurement and use of 800 MHz. Radios – The following recommendation was made to the Task Force: *“In order to improve the California Fire Services capabilities in regards to being all-risk and interoperable, FIRESCOPE recommends, in addition to VHF radio capability, that a conventional 800 MHz. radio should be considered in the next budget process for Strike Team Leaders and other overhead personnel. Use and operational considerations will be as approved by the Communications Unit Leader and/or Incident Commander.”*

Chiefs Stone and Praytor stated that there was little discussion and he felt uncomfortable saying that it was approved without some further consultation with the Task Force.

Incident Communications Positions/310-1/CICCS – There was considerable discussion regarding a database printout distributed by Finster that showed a compilation of all individuals listed in either MIRPS or ROSS based in California for the Incident Communications Unit positions. There were individuals that were not in one system but were in the other. There were obvious errors with spellings and incorrect agency entries. There were many circumstances where personnel listed were either retired or in one case, deceased. Perhaps most inappropriate were listings of personnel in certain ICS positions in which the person was clearly not qualified to function in that position.

Finster distributed a draft memo written by Captain Swanson that would go to each agency head requesting that only qualified personnel be allowed to fill ICS Comm Unit positions. There remains to be inconsistencies in training requirements between federal, state, and local agencies as evidenced by the CDF Communications Unit Leader class that does not adhere to 310-1 standards regarding pre-requisite training and qualifications (COMT and INCM). The memo will be word-smithed and then presented to Chief Praytor for dissemination through the OES mutual aid system.

The Chair indicated that this issue would be put on the agenda for the upcoming CDF COMPLAG meeting.

It was agreed that with the extension of the historical recognition period of CICCS until 12/31/2005 coupled with the 2006 implementation of ROSS in California, the time is right to ensure that personnel filling ICS Communications Unit positions are qualified to do so.

Chief Praytor mentioned that one of the problems with MIRPS entries is that OES Regional Coordinators may not be entering non-contract county Local Government resources into MIRPS, as he believed they should be. Chief Praytor will follow-up with Chief Zagaris on this issue and advise.

Air Guard Inclusion in IAP's – Savage indicated that this issue was still being discussed by CDF but that it appeared that there would be future compliance and compatibility with federal guidelines regarding the use of Air Guard 168.625 MHz.

Communications Response Teams – Hinshaw is working on a draft of an Initial Attack Communications Response Team proposal that could respond to a developing major incident and assist the local jurisdiction with qualified personnel until such time as the ordering process catches up with the incident.

Comm Unit Staffing Issues – This item was addressed above in Incident Communications Positions/310-1/CICCS.

CDF ICT COML & CIIMT COML/COMC Summit – Chief Stone believes that this may have value, however, he has not discussed it with Chief Praytor to determine who should sponsor the event.

Communications Resource Database – The database as it relates to ICS Communications Unit personnel was discussed during the Incident Communications Positions/310-1/CICCS topic. Since all agencies will be using ROSS as of 2006, our efforts should be on ensuring correct data is entered in that system in the future. The Secretary was not able to provide a draft proposal for this meeting as it related to cache equipment or mobile communications centers (MCC's). This issue will be discussed at the next meeting.

Marine Channels programmed in Part 90 radios for interoperability – This is an issue that needs to be addressed on a nationwide basis by a change in the FCC Rules. Perhaps Project SAFECOM could place some pressure on the FCC, as it is a hindrance to Homeland Security and Interoperability. CSG agreed that a recommendation to the Task Force to send a resolution to the California Congressional legislature might bring this issue to an awareness level. Nida will draft a letter for consideration by the Task Force.

New Business

Blue Ribbon Commission communications issues –

Issue #1 – “The Commission recommends that all federal, state and local agencies continuously maintain and update their mutual aid and cooperative agreements to reflect contemporary needs and costs”

The CSG is working on this issue by researching and defining a statewide cooperative use agreement process.

Issue #2 – “The Commission recommends that the state implement a research and development working group within FIRESCOPE to explore emerging technologies for firefighting purposes (e.g. military technology, GPS, UAV's, Operational Area Satellite Information Systems (OASIS))”

The CSG remains available to discuss or research anything related to communications. However any non-communications related electronics research should go to some other working group of interested and qualified public safety personnel. The CSG believes that it should concentrate on those issues of which it is most qualified to deal with.

Issue #3 – “The Commission recommends that each engine crew and chief officer have the capability to communicate effectively across multiple frequency bands.”

Fire operations at an incident demands effective communications. There are various means that will allow fire personnel to talk between each other including having radios in each potential band used by resources, transportable black box gateways, or network-based infrastructure gateways. Often, a Communications Plan developed by a qualified Communications Unit Leader in concert with Operations Section personnel can overcome interoperability issues at the simplest, non-technological level (such as grouping resources with similar communications capabilities, or physically pairing resources that use disparate radio systems together to share communications tools.

In general, since the Fire Siege of 2003, the FIREScope CSG has considered and made recommendations on several associated issues including recommending a 240 channel minimum VHF radio that would increase the number of local government channels available to mutual aid responders, potential adoption of a recommendation to procure 800 MHz. conventional radios for strike teams and overhead personnel to supplement VHF radios, discussion about the need to improve training and information sharing for Communications Unit personnel as they work in an ever complex, technologically advanced all-risk environment.

Need for Additional Tactical Frequencies – Hobbs requested information on what could be done to obtain additional tactical channels. At this point, without new initiatives from the FCC, there are few options available on a statewide basis to add additional fire channels. Even the new 700 MHz. spectrum, 800 MHz./Nextel re-farming, and narrow banding efforts will have a negligible positive impact on the fire service.

Creation of 800 MHz. Command and Tactical Nets – This agenda item was withdrawn by the requestor.

Election of 2005 Officers – An election was held for FIREScope Communications Specialist Group officers for 2005. There will be no changes from 2004. Tim McClelland was unanimously elected Chair; Craig Kinoshita was unanimously elected Vice-Chair. Brent Finster was unanimously elected Secretary.

FCSG Work Products – It was suggested that all approved, CSG work products be posted on the FIREScope website. In addition, the first annual meeting will be used to review and evaluate the existing work products for possible updating or corrections.

Root will review the narrowband briefing sheet prior to posting to ensure it complies with the recent changes to the FCC's benchmark dates.

Schedule Next Meeting

The next meeting of the FIREScope Communications Specialist Group will be April 26-27 in Contra Costa County.

Agenda items for the next meeting should be sent to the FIREScope Communications Specialist Group Secretary at email bfinster@cccfd.org