

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Office of Fire and Aviation  
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To: State Directors

From: Director, Office of Fire and Aviation

Subject: Field Programmable Mobile Radios

Background

Since the introduction of the Bendix King portable radio in the mid 1980s, the interagency fire community has had the ability to field program hand-held (portable) radios. This functionality is now considered an absolute requirement for interagency wildland fire operations. In the early 1990s, Bendix King introduced the field programmable mobile radio used in vehicle applications. Since that time, this capability has also become more and more a part of interagency fire operations.

With the mandate to switch to narrowband radio technologies and the development of digital land mobile radios, the requirement to field program portables has been carried over to the new technologies. Field programming of the “fire” portable radio is a mandatory requirement within the current DOI Digital Narrowband Radio Contract. It is also a requirement in the new, second, DOI Digital Narrowband Radio Contract which is now in the final process of being awarded.

Because the ability to field program a mobile radio has not been an “official” requirement for fire operations, it was not incorporated as a requirement within the second radio contract.

Current Situation

There are two mobile radios approved under the current DOI Digital Radio Contract. They are the Motorola Astro Spectra and the EFJ Model 5300. Neither mobile radio has a contract deficiency against it. Both units are fully functional TIA 102 (APCO Project 25) compliant radios. The Motorola Astro Spectra IS NOT field programmable, the EFJ Model 5300 is.

### Decision Point

The question that has been continually asked since last summer is whether or not having a field programmable mobile is now a fire management requirement. At this point in time, field programmable mobiles are a convenience for fire personnel. Many state and local radio managers and technicians feel that these radios may cause them an increased workload just to keep them properly programmed for district operations.

Therefore, it is suggested that the BLM fire management community consider the question of requiring a field programmable mobile radio for wildland fire operations.

The Fire Leadership Team (FLT) will take up this issue at the upcoming meeting December 4–6, 2001. If it is decided that field programmable mobile radios should be a BLM fire operations requirement, then this requirement will be presented to our fire management partners for agreement and implementation on an interagency basis.

State Fire Management Officers should consult with others in the wildfire community and BLM state communication managers and be prepared to discuss and reach a decision at the FLT meeting.

Questions and comments may be directed to Steve German at (208) 387-5720.

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