



Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management
Bureau of Indian Affairs: Southwest, Navajo, Western Regions
Bureau of Land Management: Arizona, New Mexico
National Park Service, Intermountain Region
New Mexico State Forestry Division
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 2
U. S. Forest Service



Date: February 7, 2020

To: Agency Line Officers and Wildland Firefighting Agencies in the Southwest Geographic Area

From: Southwest Coordinating Group

Subject: VMED Air to Ground Frequency Protocols for Air MedEvac during Wildland Fire Incidents in the Southwest Area

Background

During the winter of 2014/2015, frequency managers at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) researched the feasibility of setting a national standard frequency for Air Ambulance/Air MedEvac for wildland fire. It was decided that no single national solution was available. The direction from NIFC was for each state to pursue a solution at the local level. NIFC indicated that the VMED frequencies which are part of the National Interoperability Field Operations Guide (NIFOG) may be established for this purpose if coordinated with state cooperators (reference; [National Interoperability Field Operations Guide](#)).

In 2016 the Southwest Coordination Group (SWCG) issued a memorandum identifying the need to incorporate a standard Air to Ground frequency for Air Ambulances responding to medevac incidents on wildland fire incidents. It was mutually agreed upon that all wildfire agencies in the Southwest Geographic Area would adopt VMED28 as the primary Air to Ground Frequency when dealing with Air Ambulance/Air MedEvac operations under federal or state operational control. VMED29 would be utilized as a secondary frequency on rare occasions when VMED28 is being utilized on an adjacent medical emergency.

Current Situation

Ensuring that timely medical attention is provided and that the response effort is well-coordinated for any injured firefighter is our primary concern and focus. Therefore, the SWCG is committed to working closely with the Southwest Area Aviation, Communications, and Operations Committees, as well as other entities to improve

implementation and coordination within the wildland fire community and air ambulance vendors.

As a continued reminder, **all wildland fire agencies in the Southwest Geographic Area have adopted VMED28 as the primary Air to Ground frequency when dealing with Air Ambulance/Air MedEvac operations under our operational control.**

PRIMARY

"VMED28" = Rx 155.3400 MHz, Tx 155.3400 MHz with Tx CTCSS tone 156.7 Hz

SECONDARY

"VMED29" = Rx 155.3475 MHz, Tx 155.3475 MHz with Tx CTCSS tone 156.7 Hz

- *The SWCG requests all Air Ambulance providers who may respond to incidents in Arizona and New Mexico to have these assigned frequencies programmed into their radios if equipped with a VHF FM radio.*
- *In the event, there is a non-wildland fire medical emergency requiring air medevac and the incident is under operational control by one of the Southwest interagency dispatch centers VMED28 and VMED29 are authorized for use.*
- *The designation of these standards does not prevent alternate or contingent frequencies from being established.*

To promote utilization of VMED28 as the primary Air to Ground frequency when responding to an Air Ambulance/Air MedEvac situation on a wildland fire incident in the Southwest Area, the SWCG is re-emphasizing the importance of its continued implementation.

Implementation Update

During the implementation effort in Arizona, the SWCG became aware that there may have been a lack of coordination and education with fire departments and air ambulance companies within the state. This issue has complicated the implementation of VMED 28 as the primary medical emergency frequency in Arizona. The SWCG is committed to working with the Arizona Division of Forestry and Fire Management to better address these concerns. This endeavor will be a continued and concerted effort with all wildland fire entities in Arizona in order to ensure that the future implementation of VMED28 is successful.

To address concerns, the approval and use of the VMED frequencies have been vetted and coordinated with the Arizona Department of Public Safety, Statewide Interoperability Coordinator as well as the Federal Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).

Please be vigilant in ensuring close coordination is conducted with local cooperators and air ambulance vendors. This will ensure that all parties associated with an emergency are utilizing the same frequency. As a reminder, Chapter 7 page 177 of the 2020 Interagency Standards for Fire and Aviation Operations (Red Book) states:

*“Unit and state/regional-level fire program managers should ensure that procedures, processes, and/or agreements for use of local and regional air ambulance services are stated in writing and **effectively coordinated between the fire programs, the dispatch/logistics centers, and the service providers.** These procedures, processes, and/or agreements should address contact frequencies, coordinate format requirements, and capabilities/limitations of the air ambulance (e.g., night flying, unimproved helispots, weather restrictions)”.*

Darrell Willis

2/11/2020

Southwest Coordinating Group Chair

Date