

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Radio Issues

Date: April 20, 2026

Location: Montana

How to Adapt to the Switch from BK Mobile Radios to Kenwood Mobile Radios

Although with practice and training, hand-programming can easily be done, this process is still time-consuming during incidents in which minutes matter.

The U.S. Forest Service's national contract for mobile radios recently switched from Bendix King (BK) mobile radios to Kenwood mobile radios. Some of these Kenwood mobile radios are now being installed in Fire/Fuels vehicles that will inevitably be used on incidents. Handheld radios are not included in this contract change.

On April 20, a federal fire vehicle with a Kenwood mobile radio installed was driven to an initial-attack incident. This mobile radio did not have programming/user guide or a cloning cable to go between BK and Kenwood radios. Furthermore, fire personnel were not familiar with the platform of this recently installed Kenwood mobile radio.

Because of this situation—and with time being an important component—the decision was made to not use the mobile radio, but to rely on easily-cloned handhelds. All of the handhelds on this incident were BK.

“In the event of initial attack outside of the area in which your mobiles are programmed, it will not be possible to clone a Kenwood from a BK.”

Fortunately, during this particular incident, this radio communication alternative worked out fine. But in the event of initial attack outside of the area in which your mobiles are programmed, it will not be possible to clone a Kenwood from a BK. No cloning cables on the market can go from BK to Kenwood. They must be programmed from a computer or cloned from a Kenwood.

Therefore, Kenwood radios will need to be programmed by a radio tech from that area—as long as they have access to the correct programming software. Otherwise, these radios will need to be hand programmed by the operator.

Although with practice and training, hand programming can easily be done, this process is still time-consuming during incidents in which minutes matter.

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Lessons

- ❖ Whenever new hardware is issued that affects LCES, stop and prioritize the time to ensure that any and all people who may be using this new hardware actually know how to use it.
 - ❖ Prompt all radio techs with a crash course or programming/user guide when issuing new equipment when literature is not widely available.
 - ❖ Prioritize using vehicles for initial attack/mutual aid that have more universally programmable hardware if programming will have to come from individuals in the field.
 - ❖ If on a long-duration incident, check with the Comms Unit to see if they can clone your mobile radio. If they can't, take the time to hand program in channels, or see if a handheld radio with a magnetic antenna can be lent out.
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This RLS was submitted by:

Task Force Leader

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