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FCC wants to fine Idaho man \$34K for interfering in radio transmissions during wildfire

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An Idaho man is facing a \$34,000 fine after federal officials said he interfered with radio communications during a wildfire last summer.

According to a news release from the Federal Communications Commission, Jason Frawley communicated via radio with U.S. Forest Service and Idaho Department of Lands fire crews as they worked to contain the Johnson Creek Fire. The fire, which burned roughly 1,000 acres, was near Elk River, a small town in North Idaho about 40 miles northeast of Moscow.

The FCC said fire crews received eight “unauthorized transmissions” from Frawley, who identified himself to them as “comm tech,” over government radio frequencies on July 17 and 18.

“The individual interfered with communications between fire suppressant aircraft and ground crews by communicating his observations of hazards near the Elk Butte airstrip, where he and his radio equipment were located,” the FCC news release said.

A Forest Service supervisor drove to the airstrip on July 18, found Frawley and told him to stop his broadcasts. The FCC said Frawley admitted to the broadcasts in interviews with the U.S. Forest Service Law Enforcement and Investigations Branch, as well as in response to a letter from the FCC.

Frawley, who operates an amateur radio station and holds multiple microwave licenses, told the FCC he was trying to help by communicating with firefighters.

“Regardless of the intent, the FCC finds that the apparent willful violations cannot be overlooked as interfering with authorized radio communications — and especially public safety-related communications — is a serious violation of the law and can put lives and property at risk,” the agency’s news release said.

Frawley will have a chance to respond to the proposed fine before the FCC takes any final action.