



# Pacific Northwest Wildfire Coordinating Group

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## For Immediate Release

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## **NORTHWEST WILDLAND FIRE AGENCIES URGE PUBLIC NOT TO FLY DRONES OVER OR NEAR WILDFIRES TO PREVENT ACCIDENTS AND DISRUPTION OF SUPPRESSION OPERATIONS**

PORTLAND, OREGON – After members of the public flying drones disrupted wildfire operations in southern California twice recently, federal, state, and local wildfire managers in Oregon and Washington are urging the public not to fly Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), often referred to as “drones,” within or near wildfires to ensure firefighter safety and the effectiveness of suppression operations.

On Thursday, June 25<sup>th</sup>, airtanker operations were suspended on the Sterling Fire on the San Bernardino National Forest and on Wednesday, June 24<sup>th</sup>, airtanker operations were suspended on the Lake Fire on the San Bernardino National Forest, after drones flown by members of the public were detected in the fire areas.

“If a UAS is detected flying over or near a wildfire, we will stop airtankers from dropping fire retardant, helicopters from dropping water, and other aerial firefighting aircraft from performing wildfire suppression missions until we can confirm that the UAS has left the area and we are confident it won’t return,” said Steve Gage, U.S. Forest Service representative on the National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC) at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho. “Unfortunately, this could decrease the effectiveness of wildfire suppression operations, allowing wildfires to grow larger, and in some cases, unduly threaten lives and property, but firefighter and public safety are our top priorities in wildfire management.”

Aerial firefighting aircraft, such as airtankers and helicopters, fly at very low altitudes, typically just a couple of hundred feet above the ground, the same as UAS flown by members of the public do, creating the potential for a mid-air collision that could seriously injure or kill aerial and/or ground firefighters. In addition, a UAS flown by a member of the public that loses its communication link could fall from the sky, causing serious injuries or deaths of firefighters on the ground.

Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs) are typically put in place during wildfires that require aircraft, manned or unmanned, that are not involved in wildfire suppression operations to obtain permission from fire managers to enter specified airspace. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington Department of Natural Resources, Oregon Department of Forestry, and other wildland fire management agencies consider UAS, including those used by members of the public for hobby and recreation purposes, to be aircraft and therefore subject to TFRs. Members of the public should not fly UAS over or near wildfires even if a TFR is not in place to prevent accidents and disruption of suppression operations. Individuals who are determined to have interfered with wildfire suppression efforts may be subject to civil penalties and potentially criminal prosecution.

FAA guidance for members of the public flying UAS for hobby or recreation purposes is available online at [http://www.faa.gov/uas/model\\_aircraft/](http://www.faa.gov/uas/model_aircraft/)

For more information or to set up an interview with the Regional Fire Aviation Director, please contact Jim Whittington, Public Information Officer with the BLM Oregon State Office & United States Forest Service Alaska and Pacific Northwest Regions, at 503-808-6414. A Public Service Announcement can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Aj0BJi9Hcg>

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Follow the Northwest Coordination Center (NWCC) on Twitter: [@nwccinfo](https://twitter.com/nwccinfo).

Visit the NWCC website for a wealth of fire information: <http://gacc.nifc.gov/nwcc/> .

For more information on Pacific Northwest Fire Adapted Communities, please visit:

<http://pnwfac.weebly.com/> or follow on Twitter [@PNWFAC](https://twitter.com/PNWFAC).

Details for individual fires can be found on Inciweb: [www.inciweb.nwcg.gov](http://www.inciweb.nwcg.gov)