



# USDA Forest Service Southwestern Region Fire and Aviation Management Briefing Paper



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**Topic:** Transfer of risk from ground resources to aviators.

**Issue:** Risk Management for delivery of retardant and water by aircraft needs to be developed to ensure that a shift in risk from ground suppression resources to aviation resources does not occur.

**Background:** The 2007 fire season saw an increased demand for fire fighting resources of all types. Often aircraft were utilized in a manner that placed the pilots in hazardous situations without an accurate risk evaluation for the aerial resources being utilized in that operation. This briefing paper comes as an attempt to remind operational personnel that hazard analysis and risk assessments for aviators should be conducted for proper utilization of aviation resources. This is not a new issue. There are several documents to help provide guidance on this topic.

**Examples:**

- Airtankers building long stretches of line without ground resources present.
- Utilizing aviation resources because the terrain is too rough for ground resources.
- Fire behavior is too extreme for effective aerial delivery.

**Key Points:**

- Communication is critical –
  - Preseason (pre-work meetings, workshops, refreshers)
  - During incident (IC, Operations, ATGS, Pilots, SOFR, local unit, air to ground)
  - After Action Review (AAR)
- Incident Commanders need to have a sound tactical plan that is capable of being implemented and accomplished.
- Plan must include a valid justification for utilization of aviation resources.
- Monitor and re-evaluate the decision for utilization of aviation resources on an incident and be responsive to changes and effectiveness.

**Recommendations:**

- Begin to increase awareness at existing pre-season meetings and training. This should be an emphasis item for various workshops, fireline refreshers, contract pre-work meetings, local unit fire preparedness events and in-briefings with non-local resources.

- Ensure Incident Management Teams receive this briefing paper during in-briefings to remind them of appropriate risk assessments for aviation.
- Communicate to pilots the strategy and tactics of the missions they are being assigned. Allow the pilots to provide input in evaluating effectiveness.
- Empower all aviation personnel with the ability to speak up and be heard.
- Promote the SAFECOM system along with immediate action in reporting occurrences of inappropriate use of aviation resources and transfer of risk.

**Links:**

[Heli-mopping is a Dirty Word](#)

[Retardant: Use and Abuse](#)