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FS – Memorandum

To: Forest Service Supervisors, Fire Management Officers, and Unit Aviation Officers and Bureau of Land Management District Managers, Fire Management Officers, and Unit Aviation Officers

Subject: Emergency Medical Evacuation

Employee health and safety are the foremost priorities of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Forest Service. Routine wildland fire operations and other agency activities may place employees and contractors in areas that expose them to hazards including fire, timber falling operations, falling rocks and snags, and rugged terrain. Our capability and methods to evacuate injured persons are diverse but may be limited when injuries occur in remote, inaccessible locations.

Principal Medical Evacuation Methods

In the event of a serious or life-threatening injury to an employee/contractor, completion of the Medical Incident Report (Emergency Medical Care Guidelines – Incident Response Pocket Guide, pages 99-100) and review of established risk assessment mitigations will help facilitate decisions in selecting the appropriate and most expedient means for evacuation. The principal methods for evacuation of injured employees/contractors include ground transportation, aircraft evacuation, and helicopter external load lift (short-haul and hoist) extractions. Each of these options has certain advantages in terms of simplicity, speed, availability of capable resources, and risk.

Transport of injured employees/contractors via vehicle or onboard a helicopter (contract or emergency medical services (EMS)) are typically the quickest, most effective, and lowest risk means for evacuation. When these methods are not possible or when they may not be timely and prudent because the nature and severity of the injury poses immediate risk to life, limb, or eyesight, then helicopter extraction of an injured person via an external line may be necessary.

Approved Helicopter Extraction Resources

Helicopter short-haul is an evacuation method that relies upon a Type 3 helicopter and crew having specific training, approved equipment, and the capability to evacuate injured personnel from an inaccessible or remote site via a specialized line attached to the helicopter's airframe. Interagency short-haul helicopters can only conduct operations during daytime. visual flight rule (VFR) conditions – night operations are not possible. Crews may only have a basic Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) level of medical care capability. The National Park Service and Forest Service are the only agencies with approved short-haul programs.

Oregon (OR), Washington (WA), and other state Army National Guard (ARNG) Units, when activated by their respective states and approved for Federal use by letter, may be utilized on Federal incidents each year for fire suppression, medevac, or extraction/hoist operations as indicated in the letter of approval. The HH/UH-60 (Blackhawk) helicopter is the primary heavy lift platform available for wildland fire use for both OR and WA ARNG Units. When activated for fire suppression operations, letters and information addressing assignment, extraction/medevac capabilities, and ordering will be issued and posted to the Northwest Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NW MAC) section of the Northwest Interagency Coordination Center (NWCC) webpage.

Generally, the OR and WA ARNG HH/UH-60 aircraft and flight crews are capable of performing medevac or emergency extraction operations via an external hoist day or night when properly staffed. The level of medical care may vary from no medical capability to the paramedic level depending upon the unit and assigned flight crew. Agency provided stretchers used to package and transport injured patients cannot be used for hoist operations – the injured patient will be transferred to rescue equipment approved by the Army prior to hoisting.

Emergency Helicopter Extraction Source List

When principal medical evacuation methods and other approved aircraft resources are not available or able to provide the necessary assistance, the [Interagency Emergency Helicopter Extraction Source List](#) (EHE Source List) provides information for a number of helicopter resources on a state, geographical, and national basis that are capable of conducting emergency extractions (hoist or short-haul). An emergency helicopter request should be initiated and coordinated through the local dispatch (**utilizing 911**) or NWCC as approved by the appropriate Incident Commander (IC) or Agency Administrator (FSM 5713.53). Not all of these aircraft are Government approved (inspected and carded) but are staffed with trained and capable flight crews experienced in extraction operations. An aircraft on the EHE Source List cannot be placed on standby as a contingency unless the pilot and aircraft are working under a Department of the Interior (DOI) or Forest Service contract or approved via a cooperator aircraft letter of approval with a formal agreement in place.

Intelligence and Ordering

When approved extraction-capable resources are prepositioned in the geographic area or assigned to incidents, resource availability, ordering protocols, and direction documents will be posted and available for situational awareness on the NWCC website at:

<http://gacc.nifc.gov/nwcc/index.aspx>

This information, including a map identifying the current location of agency-approved, extraction-capable aircraft, each encircled by a 100-mile radius reference circle, can be found via the Emergency Medical Evacuation link prominently displayed on the NWCC home page.

Information products, ordering procedures, maps, and resource status will be updated by the NWCC as approved extraction-capable resources are made available for assignment and whenever changes to status or location occur. It is incumbent on fire managers, dispatchers, and Incident Management Teams (IMT) to refer to the information hosted at NWCC's Emergency Medical Evacuation link to determine available resources, for contingency planning, and to reference special ordering protocols if established.

Risk and Reward

Any type of extraction mission has a level of risk. Approved extraction operations should be considered and occur when other methods are not available or expedient, when the benefits outweigh the risks, and when performed by trained pilots and personnel that are furnished with appropriate equipment.

State Office/Regional Office (SORO) Fire and Aviation Managers do not support training and preparation for external human extraction missions outside of current, interagency-approved programs. Employees and pilots that are not trained, equipped, or approved to perform external human extraction should not be asked to perform such missions. Although the BLM National Aviation Office has acknowledged a Helicopter Emergency Longline Last Option (HELLO) as a last resort alternative, fire managers, IMTs, and helitack programs should not rely upon such unapproved operations in their planning for emergency medical evacuations.

Summary

Positioning extraction-capable aircraft nearby will not eliminate the hazards and mitigate the risks to personnel on the ground. It is important that the risk of placing personnel in remote and inaccessible locations be analyzed against the potential gain of projects and wildfires. Proper risk analysis and good risk decisions prior to engagement are the most prudent methods to prevent injuries.

When medical emergencies do occur, awareness and understanding of the availability, capabilities, and ordering steps of the various medevac and extraction alternatives and resources will help prepare Agency Administrators, ICs, and employees to properly and promptly respond.

For questions regarding the coordination of short-haul ordering and mobilization of other approved or acceptable extraction resources, please contact Ted Pierce at tedepierce@fs.fed.us or 503-808-2722. For questions on management and approval of interagency short-haul helicopters, cooperator aircraft, and aircraft capability, please contact Aaron Schoolcraft, Alaska/Pacific Northwest Assistant Fire Director, Aviation, at aschoolcraft@fs.fed.us or 503-808-2359.

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