

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

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United States
Department of
the Interior

Bureau of Land
Management

OR/WA

Reply Refer To: 5700 (FS) / 9400 (BLM)

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Memorandum

To: USDA Forest Service Fire Management Officers and Unit Aviation Managers, and
USDOI Bureau of Land Management Fire Management Officers and Unit Aviation
Officers.

Subject: Emergency Helicopter Extraction Options

Employee health and safety is the top priority in all wildland and natural resource activities. Normal and routine operations frequently place large numbers of agency employees in remote areas exposing them to considerable hazards including fire, timber falling operations, falling rocks and snags, and steep precarious terrain.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Forest Service (USFS) units must evaluate and perform a risk assessment before placing employees into remote or inaccessible locations. As risk assessments are developed and suppression strategies are implemented, the means to evacuate injured personnel quickly must be considered by Agency Administrators, Incident Commanders (IC's), and employees.

In the event of a serious or life threatening injury to an employee, 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 selecting the appropriate and the most prudent available means for evacuation. The methods for evacuation of injured employees available to Agency Administrators, IC's, and employees are considerable and varied which includes ground transportation, aircraft evacuation, and helicopter external load lift extractions. Each of these options has certain advantages in terms of simplicity, speed, and availability of capable resources.

The following describe the approved primary options available for medivac of injured employees from field environments:

OPTION 1: Ground Evacuation to Vehicle or Helicopter

Ground based evacuation via vehicle or landing a helicopter (contract or EMS) in the nearest suitable landing area are typically the most effective and quickest means to evacuate injured personnel. The nature of the injury, proximity to roads or helispots, helicopter availability, and terrain are factors that will need to be considered when opting for this method of evacuation. Other considerations include: the level of medical attention needed, where that medical attention can be reached most quickly, is there adequate resources and patient packaging equipment to facilitate lifting and moving an injured person to an evacuation site, whether an agency contract aircraft or EMS helicopter is most prudent and

can be reached most quickly, is there adequate resources and patient packaging equipment to facilitate lifting and moving an injured person to an evacuation site, whether an agency contract aircraft or EMS helicopter is most prudent and available, and if a helispot must be established. Ground or helicopter evacuation can be simple or complex depending upon a number of elements and should be factored into medical plans and risk assessments.

When ground based evacuation is not practical or prudent, if a suitable landing area is not available, or the nature or severity of the injury poses immediate risk to the loss of life, limb, or eyesight, then extraction of an injured person via an external means may be the only reasonable alternative to get the injured from a remote and inaccessible area to advanced medical care in a timely manner.

OPTION 2: Approved Agency, Partner Agencies, or Cooperators with hoist or short-haul capability

In 2015, the Pacific Northwest (PNW) FS will have one helitack crew and helicopter capable of performing short-haul missions. The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest hosts the Wenatchee Valley Crew based in East Wenatchee, Washington. This crew will consist of seven to ten short-haul trained crewmembers with three to five crewmembers qualified as Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs). At least one of the crewmembers on all emergency medical short-haul missions will be qualified as an EMT. This helitack crew while at their base or assigned to an incident will continue to perform their primary duties such as initial attack, reconnaissance missions, transporting fire crews, and dropping water.

The helicopter can be ordered through Resource Ordering Statusing System (ROSS). Additional FS short-haul helicopters from other geographical areas may possibly be obtained through the Pacific Northwest Coordination Center.

The National Park Service (NPS) will have an intermittent exclusive-use helicopter with short-haul capabilities located at Mount Rainier in 2015 (Puget Sound Interagency Communication Center). The helicopter can be ordered through ROSS. Additional NPS short-haul helicopters from other geographical areas may possibly be obtained through the Pacific Northwest Coordination Center. These orders will be coordinated through the NPS Regional Aviation Manager.

Oregon Army National Guard (ORARNG) and the Washington Army National Guard (WAARNG) have a number of UH-60 helicopters with hoist capabilities normally stationed in Salem, OR, and near Olympia, WA, respectively. Aircraft and pilots are authorized by the Assistant Fire Director, Aviation. Availability of these aircraft may be limited throughout the year due to each Guard Unit's commitments at home and abroad. Both National Guard Units can be requested for emergency extraction purposes by utilizing the "911" system. The Governor of each state may choose to activate their National Guard Units upon request or during times of emergency, including periods of high or destructive fire activity, through the Oregon Department of Forestry's (ODF) Operation Plan Smokey or through Washington's agreement with the Washington Military Department. The activation under these plans and agreements allows the aircraft to be used exclusively on incidents and utilized for helicopter medivac or extraction operations.

OPTION 3: Interagency Emergency Helicopter Extraction Source List¹

The Interagency Emergency Helicopter Extraction Source List (Source List) provides Incident Management Teams, Geographic Area Coordination Centers (GACC), Forests and Districts access to a number of helicopter resources on a state, geographical, and national basis to conduct external human extractions (hoist or short-haul) for emergency evacuations. An emergency helicopter request should be initiated and coordinated through the local dispatch or GACC as approved by the appropriate IC or Agency Administrator (Forest Service Handbook 5713.53). These aircraft are not approved government aircraft (inspected and carded) and cannot be placed on stand-by as contingency unless the pilot and aircraft are approved by letter and there is a formal agreement in place. For inquiries regarding formal helicopter agreements, contact the AK/PNW Helicopter Program Manager (541) 504-7274.

Proper risk management, identifying and planning for possible field injuries, and knowing the availability and capabilities of the various evacuation alternatives and resources will help prepare Agency Administrators, IC's, and employees to properly and promptly respond to medical emergencies.

Please contact PNW/AK Assistant Fire Director Aaron Schoolcraft, Aviation, at (503) 808-2359 or by email at aschoolcraft@fs.fed.us with any questions.



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¹ [http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/aviation/av_library/Revision_8_EHE%20Source%20List%20\(03-01-14\).pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/aviation/av_library/Revision_8_EHE%20Source%20List%20(03-01-14).pdf)