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www.blm.gov/or / www.fs.fed.us/r6



File Code: 5700 (FS) / 9400 (BLM)
Route To:

Date: June 23, 2015

Subject: Emergency Medical Evacuation Capability, Equipment, and Guidelines

To: Agency Administrators

Employee health and safety is the foremost priority of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Forest Service. Routine wildland fire operations and other agency activities may place agency employees 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 is diverse but may be limited when injuries occur in remote, inaccessible locations.

In response to this need, the Forest Service has developed a short-haul program to provide an approved method for the vertical extraction (helicopter lift extractions) of injured personnel. This program is now approved for operations in 2015 and includes one aircraft and crew that will be hosted by the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. Because one aircraft and crew may not meet the needed regional coverage or capacity during peak periods during the field season, Pacific Northwest (PNW) wildland fire agencies will continue to order and make available partner and cooperator aircraft that have approved equipment, aircraft, and pilots, for short-haul or other vertical extraction operations. A description of these resources and emergency medivac options and procedures will be thoroughly described in a follow-up letter.

Despite efforts to provide an adequate number of aviation assets with approved extraction systems and capability, crews and Incident Management Teams (IMT) have been acquiring various litter systems outfitted with lift equipment for the purpose of vertical extractions. One system, the Traverse Rescue Stretcher (TRS), is one example of a stretcher that could be outfitted with a lifting bridle for vertical extractions. The TRS is an acceptable equipment item for packaging and ground transport of injured personnel; however, the TRS lifting bridle is not approved by the BLM or the Forest Service, nor our partners and cooperators, for vertical human extraction.

It is important that Agency Administrators, Incident Commanders (IC's), and employees understand that they may have choices during emergencies. Pre-established medical response plans should be developed to identify closest and appropriate transport, to include areas where carrying injured personnel to an established helispot to load internally into a helicopter may be the quickest and safest method to get injured personnel to advanced medical attention. Ground based transport and internal helicopter transport should remain the agencies' first choices for

emergency medical evacuations. IMT's, crews, and personnel are encouraged to familiarize and train with stretcher systems like the TRS in order to be better prepared for packaging and transport of injured personnel. Only when ground based or internal helicopter transport evacuations are not possible, should short-haul or other approved vertical extraction methods be considered.

Agency Administrators, IC's, and employees must make informed, risk decisions based on a risk assessment before placing firefighters and employees into remote and inaccessible locations where the likely means to evacuate a severely injured person is via vertical extraction. The risk of placing firefighters and employees in these locations must be evaluated against the potential gain of engaging the fire.

We should all be proud of our efforts to assure a safe working environment for employees. Let's continue to make good choices when it comes to engaging fires, placement of personnel in hazardous and inaccessible locations, and planning for emergencies. We will continue to support the actions of employees whenever deliberate and prudent risk decisions are made within the scope of employment to best protect our personnel.



DAVID SUMMER
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Sincerely,



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