



USFS NIGHT HELICOPTER CHECKLIST

Incident Commander	Night Operations Criteria BEFORE requesting a night aerial suppression resource, determine if the need meets at least one of the following criteria: 1) Immediate threat to human lives. 2) Immediate threat to structures. 3) Immediate threat to high-value resources and/or critical infrastructure. 4) Response would inhibit significant fire growth. Ordering Criteria ○ Ensure the receiving unit ECC has 24hr night aircraft dispatcher ○ Order Night HLCO if three (3) or more night fire suppression helicopters are ordered and expected to operate in the same area. ○ For planning purposes, pilots are limited to: 6 Hours of Flight time (day or night flights) ○ Consider extended mobilization times due to staffing schedule (1500-0300) and logistics.
Operations Section Chief	Night Operations Planning & Support ○ Review incident objectives to ensure they meet Night Operations Criteria. ○ Ensure subordinate staff can be dedicated to Night Operations (AOBD, ASGS, HEB1, etc.). ○ Obtain information on the night flying operation: 1) Number of aircraft and type.

	2) If three (3) or more night fire suppression helicopters are ordered to work the same area at night – night Aerial Supervision is required. 3) Area of operation. 4) Mission objectives. ○ Incident Commander approves night flying operations for each operational period. ○ Advise the Air Ops Branch Director (AOBD) of the intent to conduct night flying operations and the night flying objectives. ○ Inform all Branches and Divisions of the pending night flying missions. ○ Ensure the AOBD conducts a night Air Operations Brief before night operations, including priorities and objectives.
Air Operations Branch Director	Night Operations Planning & Support ○ Inform ATGS of pending night flying operations to include, but not limited to: 1) Number of aircraft ordered. 2) Night HLCO identification and contact information, if applicable. 3) Night fire suppression flight crew contact information if HLCO is not assigned. 4) Inform ATGS if a day reconnaissance is requested by the night helicopter flight crew. ○ Dip Site safety parameters for night operations: is staffing or security warranted? Determine if alternate dip sites are needed and ensure they are approved for use. ○ Prepare and staff Helibase for night operations. ○ Brief to Ground Ops night shift on the intended use and location of water dropping, rescue, or UAS operations ○ Consider placing night fire suppression aircraft away from day aircraft at the Helibase to mitigate FOD and aircraft maintenance interruptions. ○ Identify each aircraft's recovery location if other than the Helibase.

	○ Establish a 24 hr. TFR is in place, and you can monitor the frequency (best practice) ○ Identify priority worksite locations within the FTA for each night aircraft. ○ Conduct Air Operations Brief for night operations, ensure flight crews receive priorities and objectives. ○ Determine if a ground-filling water point is required if dip sites are scarce. ○ Ensure Aviation Risk Assessment has been completed, Hazards identified and mitigated for night operations ○ Ensure Crash Rescue Plan and procedures are briefed and reviewed ○ Evaluate Fueling locations 1. Location in relation to incident 2. Security 3. Land use agreements 4. Facilities ○ Coordinate with GACC and Regional staff through normal channels on incident night operations.
Division/Group Supervision	Priorities and Objectives ○ Receive a brief from the Operations Section Chief to determine the mission priorities and objectives for night helicopters to support ground personnel during the operational period. These priorities should be determined before the aircraft reports at-scene. ○ Priorities should consider the following: 1) Structure protection. 2) Establishing anchor points. 3) Perimeter control. 4) Suppressing spot fires or Slop overs. Communication ○ Brief all assigned personnel regarding night aerial suppression operations.

	○ Ensure proper Air-to-Ground frequencies are operable and utilized. ○ Determine a ground point of contact to communicate with the assigned aircraft. ○ Ensure ground crew member accountability in the area where air operations are being conducted. Lighting Discipline ○ All ground personnel shall use headlamps in the vicinity of air operations. ○ Consider using chemical lights attached to ground personnel to increase the visibility of personnel on the fire line by flight crews. ○ Use strobe lights (only at the request of flight crews) in conjunction with Air-to-Ground radio communications to identify water drop locations and/or identification of ground personnel. Do not point strobe or headlamps directly at the aircraft unless directed by the flight crew. The use of lasers by ground personnel is prohibited Blue or green lights emit a spectrum that cannot be seen through Night Vision Goggles (NVGs) on the fire line. RED, YELLOW is the preferred color. Hazard Identification ○ Aerial resources shall be notified of the following hazards: 1.) Known dip site hazards, such as powerlines, cables over the site, and snags. 2.) Authorized UAS operations or Unauthorized Incursions. 3.) Aerial Hazards at or near the work area. Target Description
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	○ Have GPS coordinates (Degrees/Decimal/Minutes format) ready for the general locations requiring helicopter support. ○ Identify prominent landmarks to aid aircraft for specific target descriptions: 1) Man-made landmarks such as roads, developed areas, isolated structures, vehicles, etc. 2) Natural landmarks include peaks, outcroppings, rivers, streams, lakes, etc. 3) Landmarks such as lighted roads, freeways, and buildings are preferable. 4) Lighting such as a chem light buzz saw or a strobe (only at the request of flight crews) can assist in identifying a ground crew's location. Drop Zone Precautions ○ Establish fire line procedures to ensure line clearance before night helicopter operations. ○ Ensure line clearance before the first drop and communicate the clearance on the assigned Air-to-Ground frequencies. ○ Verify drop zone clearance. Ensure 100-foot minimum line clearance at water-dropping locations during night helicopter operations. Hazards may include rolling and falling material due to rotor wash and fire suppressant impact.
US Forest Service Points of Contact	HPM Joch Hutchison: 916-709-6747 Night HOS Matt Muller: 916-767-9787 RASO Lyndsay Johnson: 661-565-6843 Helicopter Operations Duty Line: 916-640-1034 NOPS: 530-226-2800 SOPS: 951-320-2093