



U.S. Forest Service Fire and Aviation Management Update



May 6, 2011

Topic: National Rappel Program

Overview: Fire Program Solutions (LLC) completed the “National Rappel Programmatic and Needs Assessment Review”. During the first week of March the proposed National Rappel Steering Committee (NRSC) reviewed the study and drafted several recommendations for review by all regions and Fire and Aviation Management (FAM) leadership.

Updates: Nation Rappel Program:

National Rappel Steering Committee (NRSC):

This committee is responsible for providing advice and counsel to the Director of FAM on the National Rappel Program. The focus of the steering committee is to provide program oversight and facilitate the development, implementation, and monitoring of the standardization for all Forest Service Rappel Programs. This includes crew structure, equipment, helicopters, training, operations, facilities and data management systems for safety and equipment documentation. From the National Rappel Programmatic and Needs Assessment Review this group developed recommendations on the base locations, numbers of rappel helicopters and crew size.

Recommendations for National Rappel Program Bases (22 total Type 2 Helicopters)

The following locations have been recommended as base locations for the National Rappel Program.

- R-1: Hamilton, Libby
- R-2: Monument
- R-3: Prescott
- R-4: Price Valley, Lucky Peak, Salmon
- R-5: Heaps Peak, Scott Valley, Kernville, Quincy, Trimmer, Trinity, Arroyo Grande, Chester
- R-6: Wenatchee, John Day, Siskiyou, Prineville, Frasier, Sled Springs

The base locations need to be evaluated, reviewed and finalized by the Regions. The implementation plan will be determined when the base locations are finalized. The current aircraft locations would not change until the National Contract awards in 2014. Three of the National Efficiency Helicopters (Mag 7) have been and will continue to be utilized as Rappel Helicopters, one each at Salmon, Wenatchee and John Day through 2014.

Clarification of Initial Attack Mobilization Standards for Rappel Modules

Both the spotter and local requesting unit shall exercise judgment in determining the rappel configuration and consider the environmental and operational factors that influence safe and effective mission accomplishment prior to departing the rappel base. The configuration will be identified as either “rappel configured” OR “rappel equipped” and should be communicated to the controlling dispatch center upon mobilization.

IHRG Appendix I – Acronyms and Definitions

Rappel Configured: Spotter and rappeller(s) have donned rappel and spotter gear. All personnel have performed necessary equipment and procedure checks and are in approved seating positions.

Helicopter is configured with ropes and rigged descent devices. Cargo is packaged and secured with adequate letdown gear on board and in position for cargo deployment. Bucket, longline, remote hook, and additional fire fighting tools may or may not be on board, as environmental conditions, mission requirements, and helicopter performance dictate.

Rappel Equipped: Spotter and rappellers on board with all necessary equipment for initial attack and rappel operations. Essential cargo (bucket, longline, remote hook, additional fire fighting tools) will be on board as mission planning dictates.

IHRG Appendix L – Rappel Risk Management for Fire Missions

Section 1: Pre-flight, in-flight, Arrival and Size-up

- f. Decision Point 1: Before departure the spotter must consider the environmental and operational factors and local unit recommendations that influence departing the base of operations configured or equipped.

Type II Medium Helicopter

In order to standardize the helicopter rappel program only Type II Medium helicopter are approved for rappel operations for the foreseeable future. A Helicopter Screening and Evaluation Board will evaluate all future helicopter platforms for rappel and other operations.

Rappel Crew Size and Structure

Establishment of a minimum staffing level for Type II Medium rappel bases has been recommended by the NRSC. Standardize crew modules with either 15 or 21 personnel per base (dependent upon facility capacities). Each module must be managed appropriately, characterized with strong leadership to promote safe operations and provide for flexibility and enhance career development opportunities. Implement 15 person modules as a minimum module size. The development of specific rappel module structure will be tasked to the National Rappel Working Team.

National Rappel Specialist

The Programmatic Risk Assessment and Quality Assurance Evaluation for Helicopter Rappelling recommended that a National Rappel Specialist be hired. The position is in the process of being classified and will be detailed for the 2011 season or until position is filled permanently.

National Rappel Program

The Forest Services National Rappel Program needs clarification to designate rappellers as a National Shared Resource (NSR). Provide definition and direction on what NSR means at the local unit level, through national mobilization. This issue has been tabled for 2011 and will be worked on during the winter of 2012.

Train the Trainer:

The National Rappel Program Train the Trainer was held in Boise Idaho the week of April 18-21. The intent of Train the Trainer is to inform all helicopter rappel spotters and spotter trainees of the changes related to rappel training that have taken place during the standardization process. In addition Train the Trainer outlines consolidated rappel training. Train the Trainer is required of all spotters and spotter trainees from rappel programs that have been identified as reactivating in 2011. Spotters and spotter trainees from programs that were not identified as reactivating in 2011 attended as desired.

Consolidated Rappel Training:

All consolidated rappel training will be conducted in John Day, Oregon for 2011. Training will consist of three re-currency (veteran) sessions and two initial (rookie) rappeller sessions. Re-currency training for

previously carded rappel personnel from rappel programs that have been identified as reactivating in 2011 will be held the weeks of April 25, May 2, and May 23.

The first Initial Rappeller Training session is scheduled for June 6th through the 11th. The Cadre for this session will be comprised of individuals from the Pacific Northwest familiar with the consolidated training. The session will be shadowed by members of the second Initial Rappeller Training Cadre to promote consistency between the two sessions. The second session is scheduled for June 14th through the 19th. The Pacific Northwest Region will provide guidance to support out of region cadre members with consolidated training practices.

Crew Resource Management Training (CRM):

CRM training will be conducted in John Day, Oregon on June 5th and on June 13th. CRM training will focus on pilot/spotter interaction. Helicopter Inspector Pilots (HIP's) from each of the participating regions must attend both sessions of Pilot/Spotter CRM training. Pilots and relief pilots assigned to PNW host bases will attend the June 5th training; whereas all pilots and relief pilots from out-of-region host bases will attend the June 13th session. Pilot flight evaluations for rappel operations will take place on June 6th and June 14th. Contractual pre-work must take place prior to the start of consolidated training.

Interagency Helicopter Rappel Guide

The Interagency Helicopter Rappel Equipment and Procedures Committee (IHREPC) have finished reviewing and editing the Interagency Helicopter Rappel Guide. The Guide has been approved by the Interagency Helicopter Rappel Working Group (IHRWG) and submitted to IHOPs for review. Once approved it will be submitted to NIAC for approval.

Rappel Equipment

Rappel Bases that have not been activated for the 2011 are asked to communicate with their Regional IHREPC representative on the number of Bourdon snap hooks, rappel ropes, sky genies, rappel gloves, rappel harnesses, and ancillary rappel equipment (i.e. gunner straps, snub straps) that they currently have in inventory which can possibly be redistributed to reactivating rappel bases. To help standardize rappel equipment and inspection criteria, the Forgecraft 3144 snap hook is being replaced by the Bourdon 1210 snap hook. This is one of the primary pieces of equipment that needs to be redistributed nationally. For programs that donated rappel equipment in 2011, the Washington Office will help offset costs for obtaining any additional equipment in the future. The Washington Office will only be responsible for equipment redistributed and will not be responsible for equipment needs in excess of donated equipment.

New Rappel Equipment

Missoula Technology and Development Center (MTDC) is still progressing on testing and evaluating the new descent system. After initial testing in LA County, 2010, MTDC made recommended modifications to the device and additional testing has been accomplished during the week of April 4-8 2011 with favorable results. Additional testing from helicopters is planned in September 2011.

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