



Forest
Service

Washington
Office

1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

File Code: 6730
Route To:

Date: FEB 01 2010

Subject: Accident Review Board Safety Action Plan on the Willow Helibase Rappel
Accident Fatality

To: Deputy Chief for State and Private Forestry

An Accident Review Board (ARB) was convened on November 12, 2009, to review the safety investigation report of the Willow Helibase Rappel Accident Fatality.

A Forest Service Safety Investigation Team conducted the investigation and presented the Factual Report and Management Evaluation Report to the ARB. The reports were reviewed and approved without revision. A Safety Action Plan (SAP) was developed by the ARB that focused on key items that, when implemented, could help prevent similar mishaps in the future. I approve the ARB's recommendations.

Please review the enclosed SAP and take appropriate steps to ensure completion of each respective action by the assigned date. The Forest Service's Office of Safety and Occupational Health should be notified as each item is completed.

I am directing all Forest Service rope-assisted helicopter insertion/extraction operations for personnel to "stand down" until the ARB recommendations are satisfied and the Deputy Chief, State and Private Forestry (SPF), is reasonably certain that the program can perform its mission safely. Once this is accomplished, the Deputy Chief, SPF will formally reinstate these programs.

For further information, please contact Dr. Gary W. Helmer, ghelmer@fs.fed.us or (703) 605-5139.


THOMAS L. TIDWELL
Chief

Enclosure

cc: Ralph Dorn



**Accident Review Board Safety Action Plan
Willow Helibase Rappel Accident Fatality
November 12, 2009**

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Recommendation 01: Conduct a national review of the helicopter rappel program that looks at the overall mission, risks versus benefits, and the adequacy of National/Regional standardization oversight.

Responsible Unit: State and Private Forestry

Lead Unit: Fire and Aviation Management

Completion Date: May 1, 2010

Recommendation 02: Continue implementation of procedures outlined in Safety Alert Forest Service 09-02 to ensure proper use of equipment for the remainder of the 2009 fire season.

Responsible Unit: State and Private Forestry

Lead Unit: Fire and Aviation Management

Completion Date: May 1, 2010

Recommendation 03: Conduct a risk assessment that would evaluate the benefit of using a retaining item for centering the "J-hook" versus the risks associated with side loading. Develop a national equipment standard that discontinues the use of the "O-ring", along with appropriate training to address the risks identified in the assessment.

Responsible Unit: State and Private Forestry

Lead Unit: Fire and Aviation Management

Completion Date: May 1, 2010

Recommendation 04: Evaluate the need for new rappel equipment that would further reduce the potential of human error and improve overall capability of equipment.

Responsible Unit: State and Private Forestry

Lead Unit: Fire and Aviation Management

Completion Date: May 1, 2010

Recommendation 05: Develop an inspection process for rappel equipment. Also include a more rigorous inspection process to be completed each time a "Tri-link" is opened or equipment changes occur.

Responsible Unit: State and Private Forestry

Lead Unit: Fire and Aviation Management

Completion Date: May 1, 2010

Recommendation 06: Train to identify improper rigging as well as proper rigging of rappel equipment designed to enhance participants understanding of their equipment, improve awareness, and increase safety.

Responsible Unit: State and Private Forestry

Lead Unit: Fire and Aviation Management

Completion Date: May 1, 2010

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Recommendation 07: Develop training task books for each of the rappel positions including: rappeller, spotter, and check spotter.

Responsible Unit: State and Private Forestry

Lead Unit: Fire and Aviation Management

Completion Date: May 1, 2010



CHARLES MYERS

Chair, Accident Review Board

APPROVED DISAPPROVED

DATE FEB 1 2010



THOMAS TIDWELL

Chief Forester of the United States

