

NIFC News

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LIMITED NUMBER OF LARGE AIRTANKERS RECALLED TO SERVICE

BOISE, IDAHO, July 2, 2004 – U.S.D.A. Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth and U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management Director Kathleen Clarke today announced five airtankers would return to firefighting service, possibly as early as next week. The decision is the result of a safety analysis performed on eight aircraft, and inspections are continuing on the other three. The ex-Navy P-3 Orion aircraft are owned by Aero Union Corporation in Chico, California.

“DynCorp Technical Services provided the expert analysis, and has worked to research the operations and maintenance records of these aircraft, and performed a thorough site visit to examine them,” Bosworth said. “With better information, and a precedent set for more thorough inspections by the contractors, we believe we can operate this equipment safely this fire season.”

“The safety of our firefighters, aviators and the communities we serve is our first priority,” Clarke said. “Being able to bring these assets back into the fire managers’ toolbox is a real benefit. The return to service of these aircraft will assist the on-the-ground firefighters to safely stop wildfires.” The Forest Service and the Department of the Interior in May had terminated the contracts for 33 large airtankers to be used in firefighting missions due to concerns over the airworthiness of the aircraft, and firefighter and public safety. The decision was based on safety recommendations from the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) issued April 23, 2004 at the conclusion of their investigation into three fatal airtanker crashes related to in-flight structural failures.

On June 9th, 2004, the Forest Service signed an agreement with Fort Worth-Texas based DynCorp

Technical Services to provide the expertise in analyzing the airworthiness documentation provided by contractors for the heavy airtankers. DynCorp was selected because they have the facility and personnel to respond immediately to the analysis needed, and because of their extensive experience with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection in maintaining and repairing the CDF firefighting aircraft and equipment. DynCorp also has extensive experience with Army and Navy aircraft programs, which aids in examining these aging former military aircraft.

The aircraft and pilots will be re-certified with a check pilot, and a new contract negotiated and implemented allowing them to begin flying as soon as possible. The potential for new wildland fire activity will guide the decisions on where to initially assign the large airtankers since they are an initial attack tool in firefighting.

Since the decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis for each aircraft and DynCorp is continuing to analyze documentation on additional large airtankers, it is unknown how many other, if any, aircraft will be returned to firefighting work. DynCorp is currently examining the data packages from five other contractors, and will submit each report to the Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth as they are completed.

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