



This document is intended to provide information and guidelines to assist in planning interagency night time air operations through the use of the FIREScope: Night Operations - Division / Branch Briefing Worksheet Checklist.

Aircraft Assignment

Determine the number, types and call signs of helicopters assigned to night operations.

- *A Helicopter Coordinator should be designated when using more than two helicopters at night.*
- *Most agencies use Type II helicopters, some agencies may use Type I.*
- *Helicopters used at night may not have been designated prior to distributing the IAP and the ICS-220 form.*

Identify the Divisions where helicopters will be assigned.

- *Div. Supervisors must be made aware of night time helicopter operations occurring within their operational area.*
- *On large multi-division incidents, night time helicopter operations should be limited to specific designated areas of operation in conjunction with the predetermined tactical objectives.*

Establish the time aircraft will become available and time when night air operations will conclude.

- *Helicopters used during the day may require maintenance and/or inspection prior to being placed in service for night time operations and again before returning to service in the morning. This may affect start and stop times.*
- *An Air Operations Briefing must be completed prior to any helicopters beginning night time operations.*
- *Flying during the twilight hours immediately after sunset and before sunrise should be avoided due to the limited effectiveness of the night vision devices under those conditions.*

Aircraft Tactical Objectives

Determine the type of missions to be flown during the night time operational period.

- *FIREScope Night Flying Guidelines designate the following acceptable missions for night time helicopter*
 - *Water dropping from helicopters with fixed tanks*
 - *Recon, mapping, detection*
 - *Aerial ignition PSD*
 - *Point-to-Point*

Determine the suppression tactic(s) that will be used by helicopters during night time operational period.

- *Suppression tactics need to be coordinated between the ground and air resources.*
- *Flight crews need to know the tactical objective of the ground resources in the operational area.*
- *Flight crews should be assigned a coordinated tactical objective such as:*
 - *Structure Protection*
 - *Anchor and Flank*
 - *Detection and Suppression of Spot Fires*



Communications

Determine appropriate frequency for Air-to-Ground communication.

- *Determine if the same Air-to-Ground frequency used during the day will be available at night.*
- *Be aware that frequency changes made at the end of a daytime operational period may affect your night time communication planning.*
- *Air to ground communication may be conducted on the division tactical frequency if the complexity of the incident permits and the volume of traffic is manageable.*

Determine who may communicate directly with the helicopters, HLCO or ATGS.

- *Division Supervisors are responsible for ensuring effective communication from ground units to helicopters assigned within their operational area.*
- *Division Supervisors may delegate the authority to communicate directly with the helicopters, Helicopter Coordinator or Air Tactical Group Supervisor.*

Crew Member Accountability

Establish a method for identifying all personnel in the area of night time air operations.

- *All fireline personnel should utilize headlamps at all times in areas where air operations may be conducted at night.*
- *Colored chemical light sticks may be used to identify specific crews or key personnel.*
- *Blue chemical light sticks emit a spectrum of light that is not visible to night vision goggles (NVG).*
- *Never shine a light directly at a close by aircraft.*

Address the appropriate use of strobe lights as a means to identify a particular crew or individual.

- *Small emergency strobe lights may be used as a means to identify a particular crew or individual.*
- *Flight crews must be advised as to who will be using strobe lights and for what purpose they will be used.*
- *Ground personnel must be advised why and when to activate strobe lights.*

Target Description

Address the use of GPS coordinates for target description.

- *GPS coordinates are best used in the long range phase of target description to direct aircraft to the general area of the target.*
- *GPS coordinates are of limited value when attempting to describe a target once an aircraft is circling the area.*
- *Use degrees/decimal minutes (N dd.dd W mmm.mm) when expressing GPS coordinates*

Identify obvious landmarks that can be used as reference points for target description.

- *Man-made landmarks such as roads, developed areas, isolated structures, vehicles, etc.*
- *Natural landmarks such as peaks, outcroppings, rivers, streams, lakes, etc.*
- *Landmarks such as lighted roads, freeways and buildings are preferable because they can be seen by personnel on the ground as well as from the air.*



Target Description (Continued)

Address the use of strobe lights as a means for target description.

- *When planned appropriately, strobe lights may be used at night as a means to identify a particular location as a reference point in medium and short range target description.*
- *Flight crews must be briefed on the intended use of strobe lights.*
- *Ground personnel must exercise discipline in only using strobe lights at the appropriate time and only when in communication with the pilot of the aircraft they are attempting to signal.*

Address the use of, or restriction of the use of laser pointing devices.

- *When planned appropriately, laser pointing devices may be used at night as a means to assist in medium and short range target description.*
- *Flight crews must be briefed on the intended use of laser pointing devices.*
- *Ground personnel must exercise discipline in only using laser pointing devices at the appropriate time and only when in communication with the pilot of the aircraft they are attempting to signal.*
- ***NEVER*** *point a laser device at an aircraft at any distance.*

Drop Zone Safety Precautions

Establish a method for verifying that the drop zone is clear of personnel before each drop.

- *Verification of a clear drop zone may be accomplished by radio or by a visual inspection from the air.*
- *Radio verification requires good communication and positive crew accountability.*
- *Visual verification from the air may be difficult due to smoke and vegetation canopy.*
- *Visual verification from the air is made easier when all ground personnel are using headlamps.*

Aircraft Reassignment

Establish a method and level of authority for reassigning aircraft during the night operational period.

- *The locations and tactical assignments of aircraft engaged in night time fire fighting operations must be closely monitored in order to stay within the risk assessment criteria.*
- *Reassignment of aircraft to missions outside of the risk assessment criteria must be properly evaluated and approved at the appropriate level.*
- *A new risk assessment may be necessary prior to reassigning aircraft to new locations or tactical operation.*

Establish a Rescue / Med-Evac Response Plan for the night time operational period.

- *If a helicopter assigned to night time tactical firefighting operations is also designated as the night rescue/med-evac aircraft, the risk assessment should reflect the potential EMS mission as well.*
- *Non-incident helicopters (Military, CHP, Sheriff) designated as the night rescue/med-evac aircraft that are not assigned to night time fire fighting operations must be advised of the night time aerial fire fighting plan.*
- *All incident personnel must be briefed on the night time rescue/med-evac response plan.*
- *Briefing all personnel on the night time rescue/med-evac response plan may be difficult due to the plan being developed after publication of the daily IAP.*