



USFS Night Flying Helicopter - Vendor Lessons

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Helicopter Express

- Founded in 1996
- Fleet of 24 helicopters and 2 airplanes
- Majority of work in federal natural resource work
- Specialized operations include: firefighting, precision external load, short-haul, rappel, and NVG operations



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Contract Overview

- Bell 205A-1++ with crew and support equipment
- 180 days in Lancaster, CA hosted by Angeles NF
- Completed 3rd of 5 years



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NVG Program

- First time HXP has conducted NVG operations
- First time in a generation that USFS has conducted NVG operations
- Quick turn on NVG award



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Standup Process

- 3 months from date of award until performance
- Aircraft – tank, extended gear, NVIS (radar alt), TAS, i/o Node
- Op Spec modification
- Identification and training of personnel
- USFS personnel training
- Pilot carding - included all crew combinations



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General Operations

- Staffed 24/7 for 180 days
- Each shift is 12 hours with possible extension to 14 hours
- Maximum oversight – forest, regional, national USFS plus news media and Congressional inquiries
- 2 QAs per year and pre work and AAR for each season
- Attached to SoCal



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Night Operations

- Max flight hours – Day:8, Night: 5
- Night is ground fill only
- Dedicated night air attack
- Shift changes require aircraft reconfiguration – mirrors, snorkel, and bubble door
- Complete night risk assessment prior to launch



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Issues

- Large crew size
- 24 hour schedule
- Education of ground units and teams
- Crew changes away from base



Evolution

- Increased night flight hours limitation
- Altered night crew schedule
- Improved operational training
- Pilot night proficiency increased



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Contract Stats

	Day Flight Hours	Day Initial Attacks	Night Flight Hours	Night Initial Attacks
2013	160.5	21	102.9	13
2014	96.8	9	56.2	10
2015	150.2	16	61.6	7
Average	135	15	70	10



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Lessons Learned

- Take it slow
- Understand limitations
- Realistic training
- Build teams



Questions?

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