

# GENERAL ORDER

FAIRFAX COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT



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SUBJECT: POLICE HELICOPTER OPERATIONS

NUMBER: 530.2

CANCELS ORDER DATED: 1-1-97

DATE: 10-1-10

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## I. PURPOSE

This general order is issued to establish guidelines and procedures for use of the Fairfax County police helicopters. The operational success of the Helicopter Division is dependent on effective coordination between air and ground units, and their combined knowledge of the operational procedures contained in this order.

## II. POLICY

The Fairfax County Police Helicopter Division will function primarily as an aerial platform for police operations in traffic control, apprehensions, crime prevention, safety and searches. In terms of operations, medical evacuations for life threatening situations will be the highest priority. Field units are encouraged to utilize this support whenever the situation warrants. Inquiries regarding possible uses of the helicopters should be directed to the Helicopter Division.

## III. Definitions

- A. Pilot-In-Charge: The designation for the pilot who is in charge of the helicopter during actual operations. If there are two pilots in the helicopter, only one acts as pilot-in-charge.
- B. Flight Officer: The crew member who functions as the police observer and an emergency medical technician.
- C. Flight Crew: The crew members who are assigned to a helicopter during a tour of duty. This will generally be a pilot and flight officer.
- D. Rotorwash: The wind generated by the rotor blades of the helicopter.
- E. Landing Zone: Any area designated as a location for the helicopter to land.
- F. Confined Area: Any landing zone that is small in size and probably having poor approach paths. The helicopter must make a steep approach and takeoff and has limited maneuvering space. A large appearing area may actually be confined because of obstructions, such as light poles. Officers should be aware the amount of load the helicopter can carry will be

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influenced by how confined the area is that has been chosen as a landing zone.

- G. Medical Control: The senior physician on-duty at Fairfax Hospital Emergency Department, or appropriate designee.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Officers Requesting Helicopter Support

1. Requests for a helicopter must be made through a supervisor. However, if an officer assigned to a crime in progress or crime recently committed feels the helicopter may aid in the detection of suspects, vehicles, or property, he may request the police helicopter to respond to the area.
2. Establish communications with the Department of Public Safety Communications relating:
  - a. Location of incident, including landmarks, nearest major intersections, or other reference points. Keep in mind, street numbers are impossible to find from the air.
  - b. Type of incident.
  - c. Specific nature of service requested and any specific equipment required.
3. If a landing is indicated:
  - a. Establish a safe landing zone and relay all information to the helicopter crew.
  - b. Request the necessary officers for control of vehicular traffic and civilian by-standers.

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- c. Maintain direct communications with aircraft during landing phase and assist the crew by observing approach and relaying any necessary corrections by hand signal.
  4. No ground personnel, police or others, shall approach the helicopter unless specifically directed by the pilot or flight officer. When directed to approach the helicopter, personnel shall do so only from the front of the aircraft. Under no circumstances should anyone approach the tail area, or cross from side to side under the tail boom of the aircraft. Personnel approaching the aircraft should continue to observe the pilot for any additional instructions which the pilot may convey.
  5. Unless personnel are otherwise directed, the flight officer shall be responsible for opening and closing the aircraft doors.
- B. Department of Public Safety Communications (DPSC)  
Through mutual agreement, the DPSC will do the following:
  1. Maintain up-to-date information on status of the helicopters.
  2. Relay requests and appropriate information to the helicopter crew.
  3. Limit transmissions on assigned frequency during critical phases of helicopter missions, except for the following:
    - relay of landing zone information
    - mission details
    - update information
    - actual landing phase
    - when requested
  4. Should a situation develop in which a helicopter may be needed, but has not specifically been requested, the Department of Public Safety

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Communications will alert the flight crew. This notification includes, but is not limited to, incidents such as major crimes, serious accidents, pursuits, etc.

C. Helicopter Pilot

The helicopter pilot-in-command has sole responsibility for the safe operation of the helicopter at all times (as per Federal Aviation Regulations), including the ability to terminate a mission at any point. Should a pilot abort an assigned mission, the pilot will notify the Department of Public Safety Communications of the reason(s) for the termination. When a mission is aborted, the Department of Public Safety Communications shall notify the person or agency requesting the helicopter of the mission termination.

D. Helicopter Flight Officer

In addition to regular duties, the helicopter flight officer shall direct personnel in and around the helicopter while the helicopter is on the ground. Personnel shall not approach the helicopter unless directed to do so by the flight officer. During medevac operations, the flight officer shall direct patient loading/unloading and designate who shall assist.

V. OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

A. Priorities

Missions shall be conducted in accordance with the following priorities. With limited exceptions, a mission of higher priority shall pre-empt any other mission.

Priority I: Medical emergencies in Fairfax County

Priority II: Police emergencies in Fairfax County

Priority III: Medical emergencies outside Fairfax County

Priority IV: Police emergencies outside Fairfax County

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Priority V: Routine police missions in Fairfax County

Priority VI: Non-emergency missions outside Fairfax County

B. Response

1. All requests for helicopter support must be authorized by a supervisor, except as provided in Section III. A. 1. of this order. The request should be made through the Department of Public Safety Communications.
2. The police helicopter shall not be used to transport violent or mentally ill persons.
3. Helicopter noise is a factor which may limit non-essential nighttime operations in residential areas. Supervisors/officers should be aware of this restriction in requesting helicopter support.
4. The Department of Public Safety Communications shall notify the helicopter crew of the request for helicopter support and the crew will provide an estimated time of arrival to the scene.
5. If a landing is to be made, one or more police units shall establish a suitable landing zone and relay all available information and updates to the helicopter crew.
6. One police unit on the scene shall be responsible for maintaining and coordinating communications with the helicopter crew throughout the mission.

C. Landing Zones

Off airport/helipad landings can be the most hazardous aspect of any helicopter mission, especially into areas where the pilot is unfamiliar. The importance of proper selection of a landing zone cannot be over-emphasized.

1. Confined Area Sites

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The following criteria shall serve as the minimum requirements for establishing a landing zone:

- a. Size: 50 feet by 50 feet, completely clear of obstructions.
- b. Surface: Hard surface -- concrete, asphalt, hard earth, grass, and must be free of all loose debris (gravel, trash, other material).
- c. Slope: Any slope in the landing zone must be gradual and should never exceed 15 degrees.
- d. Obstructions: Police officers establishing a landing zone must physically check a 200-yard approach and departure path. This flight path should be directly into the wind as much as possible. Approach and departure paths shall be checked for any obstructions which may be hazardous to flight. Obstructions that are clearly visible and obvious from the ground may be invisible from the air. The best example of this type of hazardous obstruction is utility wires. Ground units should always relay the presence of hazardous obstructions immediately to the helicopter crew.
- e. Marking: Officers should mark the landing zone with a flare in each corner. If possible, the flares should be anchored to prevent them from being blown about by the helicopter. At night, vehicles can be used in conjunction with the flares to light the landing zone; use low beam headlights only. Emergency vehicles may have emergency lights in operation until it is obvious the helicopter has found the landing zone. Due to the flight crew utilizing night vision goggles, cruisers directly adjacent to the landing zone shall have their emergency lights turned off to avoid blinding the helicopter crew. Spotlights should never be directed at the helicopter. If it appears the helicopter crew is having difficulty locating the landing zone, a flashlight may be used to attract the helicopter crews' attention.

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f. Scene Control: No person or vehicle shall be permitted within 50 feet of the helicopter unless specifically directed by a helicopter crew member.

2. School Property

The use of school property for a landing zone is prohibited unless:

- a. The landing is necessary for a police, fire, or rescue emergency, or
- b. Prior approval has been granted by the School Division Superintendent.
- c. If an emergency landing on school property occurs, the flight officer shall notify the Department of Public Safety Communications. The Department of Public Safety Communications supervisor shall notify the Operations Support Bureau commander or Duty Officer and the Fairfax County School Security officer.

3. Parks, Parking Lots, Etc.

For non-emergency missions, helicopter pilots should be requested to land in such areas as large parks, the Fire Services Training Center, police range, and large parking lots. The minimum requirements specified in Section C. 1. also apply to these sites.

4. Hospital Helicopter Pads

The use of hospital helicopter pads should be restricted to medical-related missions.

D. Vehicle Pursuits

The helicopter can be a very valuable aid in pursuit situations. When requested, the helicopter can respond to an area quickly and provide aerial surveillance allowing pursuing officers to remain at a safe speed and distance. Radio communication during pursuits is important, as the

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helicopter crew will provide updated information to coordinate the apprehension. Pursuits which begin on or involve interstate highways or the Virginia State Police may also be coordinated by the Virginia State Police.

When the helicopter enters the pursuit, other pursuing officers should reduce speed to safe conditions and remain in radio contact with the aircraft. The helicopter will continually report the location and direction of the pursued vehicle to enable patrol units to take appropriate action. During night pursuits, the aircraft will direct a searchlight at the fleeing vehicle whenever this can be done safely. A police supervisor in the affected district shall monitor all pursuits and provide supervisory guidance as appropriate.

E. Aircraft/Cruiser Communications

Any time patrol officers are communicating with the flight crew and are in visual contact with the aircraft, the officers shall use their vehicle "roof number" as opposed to "scout" or unit number. This procedure shall be followed in pursuits, crime scenes, accidents, and all other situations where the flight crew can visually observe and direct officers. The vehicle number should always be preceded by "cruiser," (i.e., "Cruiser 4395 to Fairfax 1"). The number on top of the vehicle is the EMTA vehicle number.

F. Coordination with Other Helicopter Units

In some cases, two or more jurisdictions' helicopters may be operational and in the air when a police incident occurs. In those situations, caution must be exercised in coordinating the response of multiple aircraft to the same geographic area. The crew of the aircraft nearest to the scene shall identify themselves and advise all other responding aircraft. Additional aircraft responding to the scene shall maintain a safe distance until directed to a specific mission by a crew member of the first aircraft.

Airborne command of a scene should correspond to ground command of the scene; (i.e., the Fairfax County police helicopter should provide primary support to Fairfax County police incidents). Similarly, the Virginia State Police helicopter should provide primary air support to Virginia State Police incidents. In exigent circumstances, such as high speed pursuits, the

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transfer of airborne command shall be postponed until such time as the situation stabilizes and the transfer can be safely accomplished.

G. Administrative Use of the Helicopter

Any request for transport or service by a County agency or employee other than police or the Fire and Rescue Department must be approved by the County Executive's Office.

H. Release of Video Recordings

Legal control and management of video recordings are subject to the same standards as set forth in General Order 430.8, Section VIII and IX. Storage and release of all video recordings made by the flight crew must be approved by the Helicopter Division commander, or their designee.

VI. SPECIALIZED EQUIPMENT

A. FLIR - "Forward Looking Infrared"

This heat-sensing device operates within the infrared spectrum penetrating darkness, smoke, haze, dust and mist. An operator can see under conditions where there is little or no visibility. The most prevalent use of the system will be for vision during the hours of darkness. The FLIR differentiates between heat in objects; consequently, bodies, animals, automobiles that have recently been driven, and anything producing heat are detectable. Although the FLIR system will not detect images through dense trees, it can penetrate light foliage and other sparse material. The FLIR provides a picture on the TV screen in the cockpit, similar to a black and white TV. People can be located on top of roofs or on the ground in total darkness. A warm vehicle engine can be located in a large parking lot.

B. Rescue Equipment

The helicopters are equipped with two types of rescue devices. The first device, the "Cinch Collar," can be used to lift a single individual. It is carried on the helicopter at all times. The second device is the "Billy Pugh" net.

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This is a rope basket that will hold two individuals. It is not normally carried in the helicopter, but is readily available on request.

Both of the rescue devices can be used for water extraction or land applications, such as evacuation from a high-rise building. They are ordinarily used in situations where the helicopter cannot land. Whenever possible, landing zones should be used for the helicopter and the rescue devices utilized only under emergency circumstances. The two devices are deployed in a similar fashion by being extended below the helicopter on a rope. The rescued person is not pulled into the helicopter; rather, the person is moved to a safe location while still beneath the helicopter.

If it is expected that either rescue device will be needed, the helicopter crew should be notified as soon as possible.

**VII. ACCESS TO HELICOPTERS BY OUTSIDE JURISDICTIONS**

Fairfax County police helicopters are available to other jurisdictions and can be accessed per the mutual aid agreement. For example, if Arlington County has a bank robbery in progress, the helicopter may be deployed. As in all cases, the priority system set forth in Section IV, Paragraph A, will be followed.

**A. Procedures**

1. All operational requests for helicopter assistance from other jurisdictions shall be made via telephone or mutual aid radio, through the Department of Public Safety Communications.
2. The Department of Public Safety Communications will then notify the Helicopter Division commander during normal working hours. After 5:00 p.m. and weekends, the Duty Officer will be notified if the request is from an adjacent jurisdiction. For requests which are not from adjacent jurisdictions, the Helicopter Division commander shall be notified, and a decision regarding the mission will be made in concert with the Operations Support Bureau commander or designee.

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3. When requests are received from adjacent jurisdictions, the Duty Officer shall confer with the on-duty flight crew. After an assessment of the situation, and contingent on the weather and availability of the aircraft, a decision will be made as to whether or not the request will be granted.
4. The outside jurisdiction shall be notified via telephone or mutual aid radio by the Department of Public Safety Communications regarding the status of their request.
5. After completion of a mission outside Fairfax County, the flight crew shall notify the appropriate commander through the Department of Public Safety Communications supervisor concerning their return to service.
6. All requests for administrative use of the aircraft outside Fairfax County must be approved by the Chief of Police.

B. Disaster Plans

1. Mutual Aid

Assistance to other Northern Virginia jurisdictions will occur after proper notification from the requesting agency has been made. Use of the aircraft will depend on availability and the ability to accomplish the mission.

2. Council of Governments Disaster Plan

If the aircraft is available and can accomplish the mission, the Council of Governments Disaster Plan shall be followed.

VIII. EMERGENCY EVACUATION REQUEST

- A. Fairfax County police helicopters will be available for medical evacuations in Fairfax County and adjoining jurisdictions, (i.e., Arlington, Prince William and Loudoun Counties, the Cities of Alexandria, Fairfax and Falls Church, the Towns of Herndon and Vienna, and the portion of the Potomac River

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that is contiguous to these jurisdictions). When medical control is notified of an emergency incident, illness, or emergency inter-hospital transport within the primary coverage area which requires the services of the Helicopter Division, the on-duty crew will be contacted by direct telephone line, or via the Department of Public Safety Communications. All medevac missions shall be requested through medical control. In the event the Department of Public Safety Communications is contacted directly, the Department of Public Safety Communications will notify medical control. In exigent circumstances, the helicopter crew will act in the best interest of the involved parties and notify medical control as soon as possible.

B. When medical control receives a request for a medical evacuation from a jurisdiction outside the primary coverage area, the decision to accept the mission will be made on a case-by-case basis by the Chief of Police, Deputy Chief of Police or a designee. After medical control has contacted the Helicopter Division with such a request, a crew member shall immediately contact the granting authority. The decision will be made after consultation with the flight crew concerning the following factors:

- Previous aircraft commitments
- Aircraft availability
- Weather conditions
- Condition of the patient
- Location of the requested mission

C. Requests for medical evacuations from jurisdictions outside of the primary coverage area will be monitored for number and type of missions. At no time shall any mission be accepted that is beyond the operational capabilities of the aircraft.

IX. RECORD KEEPING

The Helicopter Division will be responsible for providing monthly reports to the Chief of Police on the number of medical evacuations, arrests, searches, hours

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flown, requests for service, assistance to other jurisdictions, etc. on a prescribed form.

X. ACCREDITATION STANDARDS REFERENCE

VLEPSC

ADM.	OPR.
13.01	01.10
14.01	01.08
	08.03

This general order becomes effective October 1, 2010 and rescinds all previous rules and regulations pertaining to the subject.

ISSUED BY:

APPROVED BY:

Chief of Police

County Executive