

Police Department

LOB #214:

HELICOPTER DIVISION

Purpose

The Helicopter Division provides tactical police aviation support, aeromedical evacuation, search and rescue, and other specialized air support for County operations as needed. As Fairfax County's primary medevac provider, the Helicopter Division's highest priority is the preservation of life by providing advanced medical care and quickly transporting critically injured patients to area Level One trauma centers. Using specialized equipment, the Helicopter Division also assists Police Department personnel in locating critical missing people and criminal suspects.

Description

The Helicopter Division is staffed 24/7/365 and responds to more than 1,500 calls for service each year. The Helicopter Division provides services throughout all of Fairfax County and has been in continuous service since 1983.

Equipped with the Wescam MX-10 stabilized infrared and video system, crews conduct effective search, surveillance, command and control missions. Advanced moving map technology enables pin-point targeting accuracy for the coordination of patrol assets and K-9 officers on the ground. During evening hours, crews fly with night vision goggles, enhancing the effectiveness and overall safety of police operations. The specialized equipment enables crews to conduct their operations from higher altitudes in order to minimize the impact of helicopter noise in the community.

Outfitted with the latest medical equipment, the Division serves as the primary medevac provider for Fairfax County. The Division's helicopters are used to rapidly and safely transport critically injured patients to area Level One trauma centers. The Washington Metropolitan region has the most restricted airspace in the country, which greatly limits the capabilities of private medevac helicopters. Paramedics assigned to the Division undergo intensive initial and recurrent medical training and are all certified as nationally registered EMT-Paramedics. Flight officers require 12 months of extensive college-level training to obtain their necessary certifications, ensuring that patients receive the highest level of care. All Helicopter Division pilots are commercially certified with instrument ratings and a minimum of 2,000 hours of pilot-in-command experience. The Helicopter Division operates and maintains its fleet of two Bell 429 helicopters to the highest standards imposed by the manufacturer and the Federal Aviation Administration.

In addition to its primary medevac and police functions, the Division uses its aerial platform to support other County agencies in a variety of ways. Examples of these partnerships include conducting traffic surveys for the Transportation Department, providing aerial photographs of schools for their security assessments, assisting County wildlife biologists with assessing deer populations, and enabling County arborists to observe tree conditions over large areas from the air. The Helicopter Division emphasizes community outreach and engagement by regularly providing facility tours and off-site helicopter demonstrations for community groups, boy / girl scout troops, preschools, schools and organized community events.

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Benefits

A recent traffic survey conducted by Texas A&M on behalf of U.S. Department of Transportation determined that the Washington area is now number 1 in the nation in the amount of time drivers lose sitting in traffic. This has a direct impact on both emergency medical service and police officer response, as they must also deal with this traffic congestion. The helicopter response time to anywhere in the County is under 6 minutes; this allows the Division to cover the 410 square miles of the County rapidly. Fairfax County has 5 hospitals that the helicopter can provide emergency transport to, however the only burn center in the region is in Washington D.C. and normally ground transport there for severely burned patients is not a viable option.

Mandates

In their role as police officers, the Division is responsible for enforcement of selected laws of the Code of Virginia and Fairfax County Code.

In their role as emergency paramedics, the Division is responsible for the provision of emergency medical care per Virginia Code §§ 32.1-111.1 thru 32.1-111.15 & 32.1-116.1 thru 32.1-116.3; Department of Health Emergency Medical Services Regulations 12 VAC 5-30-10. Patient reporting is required per Code of Virginia Title 32; Article 3.1 32.1 - 116.1. Paramedic recertification is required per Virginia EMS Rules & Regulations 12 VAC 5-31.

Maintenance of the Bell 429 Helicopter is mandated by Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) Regulations, Part 135(25) and Part 91(7).

Trends and Challenges

The 5 year Public Safety Staffing Plan requests an additional paramedic position within the Helicopter Division. A change to the Special Operations Division's (SOD) SOPs has added safety requirements which mandate a medic on most SOD events to include SWAT training events which occur on a weekly basis. This requires assignment of a Helicopter Division paramedic to support these activities. This change was never funded with additional staff and is an issue that disrupts Helicopter operations on a regular basis. In CY 2012 the medic was used outside the Helicopter Division for approximately 296 events. These events are high-risk events that require a police medic for life safety reasons. The demand and workload for this position has grown substantially and should be officially supported by staffing a full time position.

The 2015 bond referendum will include funding to replace the Helicopter Division hangar and offices. The current facility cannot be remodeled and will have to be completely demolished. During this time, all personnel, equipment and both helicopters will have to relocate and operate from another location that has yet to be determined. As Fairfax County does not have a municipal airport, this creates logistical challenges and additional costs. However, the current hangar facilities were built in 1985 and must be replaced.

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Resources

| Category | FY 2014 Actual | FY 2015 Actual | FY 2016 Adopted |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| LOB #214: Helicopter Division | | | |
| FUNDING | | | |
| <u>Expenditures:</u> | | | |
| Compensation | \$2,184,111 | \$2,101,046 | \$2,396,746 |
| Operating Expenses | 473,148 | 332,890 | 812,021 |
| Capital Equipment | 65,369 | 121,603 | 0 |
| Total Expenditures | \$2,722,628 | \$2,555,539 | \$3,208,767 |
| General Fund Revenue | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Net Cost/(Savings) to General Fund | \$2,722,628 | \$2,555,539 | \$3,208,767 |
| POSITIONS | | | |
| <i>Authorized Positions/Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)</i> | | | |
| <u>Positions:</u> | | | |
| Regular | 21 / 21 | 21 / 21 | 21 / 21 |
| Total Positions | 21 / 21 | 21 / 21 | 21 / 21 |

Metrics

| Metric Indicator | CY 2013 Actual | CY 2014 Actual | CY 2015 Estimate | CY 2016 Estimate | CY 2017 Estimate |
|--|----------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Helicopter transportation in assisting the Fire Department with emergency medical transport from improvised landing zones to hospitals | 72 | 66 | 70 | 70 | 70 |
| Assisting the Police Department in criminal cases, the Division conducted the following number of police missions | 816 | 732 | 831 | 850 | 850 |
| Tracking criminal apprehensions and locating missing people | 60 | 62 | 52 | 52 | 52 |
| Number of public displays and tours | 66 | 76 | 69 | 75 | 75 |

The Helicopter Division is an on-call service provider responding to both Fire Department and Police Department requests.

In assisting the Fire Department with emergency medical transport from improvised landing zones to hospitals, the Division transported 66 patients in CY 2014. Emergency medical transport is based upon an assessment of the patient at the scene, distance to hospital, traffic conditions and the ability to land an aircraft safely nearby, making future estimates difficult to project.