

FAIRFAX COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT  GENERAL ORDER	SUBJECT: POLICE HELICOPTER OPERATIONS		NUMBER: 530.2
	EFFECTIVE DATE: August 24, 2018	REVIEW: July 2022	
	TOPIC: PROCEDURE		
RESPONSIBLE ENTITY: Operations Support Bureau			
ACCREDITATION STANDARDS:	CALEA 2.1.3, 33.6.1, 41.1.3, 41.2.2, 41.2.3, 41.2.4, 82.1.1, 82.1.3	<input type="checkbox"/> New Directive <input type="checkbox"/> Replaces:	
	VLEPSC ADM.13.01, 14.01 OPR. 01.08, 01.10, 08.03	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revised from 10-1-10	

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 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 helicopter should be directed to the Helicopter Division.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Pilot-In-Command: The designation for the pilot who is in command of the helicopter during actual operations. If there are two pilots in the helicopter, only one acts as pilot-in-command.
- B. Flight Officer: The crew member who functions as the police observer and paramedic.
- C. Flight Crew: The crew members who are assigned to a helicopter during a tour of duty. This will generally be a pilot and two flight officers
- 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.

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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. While an area may appear large, it 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 influenced by the confines of the area chosen as a landing zone.

G. Medical Control: The senior physician on-duty at the destination 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, they may request the police helicopter to respond to the area.
2. Establish communications with the Department of Public Safety Communications (DPSC) relaying:
 - a. Location of incident.
 - 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 bystanders.
 - c. Maintain direct communications with aircraft during landing phase and assist the crew by observing approach and relaying any necessary corrections via radio.

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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

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 to include out of county requests denied by the Police Liaison Commander (PLC) or Duty Officer.
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 DPSC will alert the flight crew. This notification includes, but is not limited to, incidents such as major crimes, serious accidents, pursuits, etc.

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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 crew will notify the DPSC of the reason(s) for the termination. When a mission is aborted, DPSC 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 PROCEDURE

A. Priorities

Missions shall be conducted in accordance with the following priorities. With limited exceptions, a mission of higher priority should 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

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 IV. paragraph A, subsection 1 of this policy. The request should be made through the DPSC.

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2. The police helicopter shall not be used to transport violent or mentally ill persons posing a safety risk.
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 to include out of county requests.
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.
7. In the event of more than one police emergency in the county, the Duty Officer will determine which event the helicopter will respond to based on the totality of the circumstances.

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

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

- a. Size: 100 feet by 100 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).

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- c. Slope: Any slope in the landing zone must be gradual and should never exceed 10 degrees.
- d. Obstructions: Police officers establishing a landing zone must physically check a 200-yard approach and departure path. 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 including overhead wires.
- e. Marking: At night, vehicles can be used 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 (NVG), 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.
- 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 DPSC. The DPSC supervisor shall notify the Operations Support Bureau commander or Duty Officer and the Fairfax County Public School Security Officer.

3. Parks, Parking Lots, Etc.

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For non-emergency missions, the helicopter should be requested to land in such areas as large parks, police range, and large parking lots. The use of hospital helicopter pads should be restricted to medical-related missions. The minimum requirements specified in Section V.C.1. also apply to these sites.

D. Vehicle Pursuits

The helicopter can be a 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 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 to ground units.

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 Department of Vehicle Services vehicle number.

F. Administrative Use of the Helicopter

Any request for transport or service by a County agency or employee other than the Police or Fire and Rescue Department must be approved by the Helicopter Division Commander or designee. This is to ensure flights are in compliance with Homeland Security flight restrictions.

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G. Video Recordings

1. All recordings will be retained in accordance with the current provisions of the Library of Virginia, Records Retention and Disposal Schedule, as specified in General Order 430.8, In-Car Video Program.
2. The duplication of video footage for training purposes, for official police related duties, or for court presentation is permissible with the approval of the Helicopter Division Commander or the OSB Commander in absence of the Helicopter Division Commander.
3. All requests for copies of events for release to the general public shall be coordinated with the Director of the Media Relations Bureau.
4. All requests for release, internal or external, shall be documented.
5. An entry shall be made into a log documenting the burning of each DVD, including time/date, person doing the burning, the requester and any other information relevant to the creation of the copy.
6. When a recording is requested as part of an internal investigation, the request shall be made by the investigating supervisor's commander.

VI. SPECIALIZED EQUIPMENT

A. Infrared Camera / NVG

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 infrared camera differentiates between heat in objects; consequently, bodies, animals, automobiles that have recently been driven, and anything producing heat are detectable. Although the infrared camera system will not detect images through dense trees, it can penetrate light foliage and other sparse material. The infrared camera provides a picture on the monitor 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.

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B. Rescue Equipment

The helicopters are equipped with two types of rescue devices. The first device, the “Mustang Survival Rescue Stick,” provides rapid flotation assistance to a person at risk of drowning. The rescue stick can be thrown between 110-150 feet and automatically inflates in seconds after contact is made with the water. The second device is the “Switlik MOM 600,” which can quickly provide emergency flotation for up to 600lbs. When deployed, the “Switlik MOM 600” water activated inflator initiates inflation of a fully reversible, easily boarded flotation platform. Both devices are carried on the helicopter at all times.

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 V. 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 DPSC.
2. DPSC 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 on-duty crew shall be notified and consulted regarding a response. The on-duty crew will then be responsible to notify the Helicopter Division Commander for final approval.
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 flight crew regarding the status of their request.

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5. After completion of a mission outside Fairfax County, the flight crew shall notify the Duty Officer or PLC through the DPSC 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 or designee.

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. RECORD KEEPING

The Helicopter Division will be responsible for maintaining records on the number of medical evacuations, arrests, searches, hours flown, requests for service, assistance to other jurisdictions, etc.

This General Order becomes effective August 24, 2018 and rescinds all previous rules and regulations pertaining to the subject.

ISSUED BY:

APPROVED BY:



Chief of Police



County Executive