Control measure

Establish communications with aircraft

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Control measure knowledge

Monitoring ground vehicles and aircraft at the incident ground is an essential part of the safe system of work used by the fire and rescue service. When deploying aircraft at a wildfire incident, fire and rescue services must establish effective air-to-ground and air-to-air communications to maintain the safety of all personnel and resources deployed. The success and safety of deploying aircraft at wildfire incidents will largely depend on the support provided by ground resources.

For further information about the effective organisation of the incident ground, refer to National Operational Guidance: Incident command. For further information about pre-planning for using aircraft at wildfire incidents, refer to the Scottish Government's Wildfire Operational Guidance.

If military aircraft are requested and deployed at a wildfire incident, the incident commander or aerial sector commander should establish and maintain effective communications with military liaison personnel.

Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services should:

- Establish the tactical limitations of any aircraft available
- Complete pre-planning activities to establish air-to-ground and air-to-air communications
- Undertake local pre-planning activity to identify radio channels that can be used for ground-to-air communications at wildfire incidents
- Consider pre-planning activity to identify suitable water sources for use with fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters

Tactical actions

Incident commanders should:

- Establish and maintain communications between personnel on the ground and aircraft

- Brief pilots and aircraft operators of their task or mission, objectives, and any hazards identified

- Brief the pilots of all aircraft regarding incident hazards and the locations of personnel

- Consider deploying a tactical lookout to accompany the operator of any aircraft as an aerial observer

- Create an aerial sector and appoint an aerial sector commander when aircraft are in use

- Appointing an aerial sector commander
- Providing ground support to the aerial sector
- Liaise with the aerial resource provider to confirm the fire and rescue service requirements

- Provide regular briefings and relay appropriate information to or from:

    - The incident commander
    - All pilots and operators of aircraft and unmanned aircraft
    - All ground resources providing support to aircraft and unmanned aircraft
    - All ground resources from the fire and rescue service and other agencies/organisations present at the incident
- Liaise with the police to ensure that any unauthorised aircraft or unmanned aircraft are removed from the incident, and request an air exclusion zone at the incident if required
- Identify suitable take-off and landing areas in liaison with pilots and operators of unmanned aircraft
- Ensure all personnel are aware of the intended locations of any water, retardant or equipment drops
- Brief pilots on where and when to complete their drops of water and/or retardant - water or retardant is normally dropped into the wind if possible, and drops should start from a strong anchor point
- Ensure ground resources and personnel are deployed to support direct attack by aircraft
- Observe effect of aerial water and retardant drops and communicate to the aerial sector commander
- Consider deploying aircraft to observe water or retardant drops from the air, to assess and communicate the relative effectiveness of water and retardant drops to pilots
- Relay any observations of water and retardant drops to pilots in a timely manner, so that they can adjust the positioning of their aircraft for subsequent drops as necessary