



National  
Operational  
Guidance

## Control measure

**Consider deploying fixed-wing aircraft  
or helicopters**



**NFCC**  
National Fire  
Chiefs Council

Developed and maintained by the NFCC

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### Control measure knowledge

Fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters can be deployed to perform a number of tactical support roles at a wildfire incident, including:

- Direct aerial attack by dropping water or fire retardants onto the burning area
- Indirect aerial attack by dropping water or fire retardants in front of the burning area to form control lines or to strengthen existing control lines
- Airlifting water to, and around, the incident ground
- Airlifting personnel and equipment to, and around, the incident ground
- Aerial reconnaissance and information gathering

It is crucial that fire and rescue services request aircraft that have the correct capability for the tasks that they need to perform. Large commercial and military helicopters, and those used by the new Search and Rescue Service, can often create too much downdraft for effective direct aerial attack.

However, if available, large helicopters can be used very effectively to move personnel and equipment around the incident ground and to and from more remote locations. Smaller helicopters operated by experienced pilots can be used very effectively for dropping water and retardant.

Refer to the National Operational Guidance: [Transport](#) for information on working with and near aircraft, including guidance on how to safely board and disembark helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft.

When requesting aerial resources the incident commander should accurately describe their requirements. The aerial resource provider has a responsibility to provide an appropriate aircraft and pilot.

### Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services should:

- Complete local pre-planning to obtain an awareness of potential aircraft providers, and the capabilities and limitations of individual aircraft and providers



- Complete local pre-planning to identify how communications between aircraft and ground resources will be established and maintained at wildfire incidents, including identifying radio channels that can be used by available aircraft
- Complete local pre-planning to identify potential areas that may be communication 'blackspots' and may affect communication between ground resources and aircraft at wildfire incidents
- Consider establishing memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with local or regional providers of fixed-wing aircraft or helicopters
- Consider improving and maintaining interoperability between aircraft providers or pilots, and fire and rescue personnel by organising co-operative training and joint multi-agency exercises
- Consider appointing personnel to perform the role of aerial observer

## Tactical actions

Incident commanders should:

- Consider the challenges of establishing and maintaining communications between personnel on the ground and aircraft
- Consider the challenges of managing the safety of multiple fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters and unmanned aircraft at the incident
- Consider deploying an appropriate member of personnel to accompany pilots as an aerial observer
- Provide briefings and/or inform ground personnel and other aircraft and unmanned aircraft of the presence of fixed-wing aircraft and/or helicopters, and provide details concerning the area in which they will be operating, the tasks they will perform, and the likely duration of those tasks
- Provide briefings and/or inform the pilots of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, of any known hazards present at the incident and the locations of personnel on the ground
- Consider the potential impact that the fire, weather conditions and topography may have on the flight and performance of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters
- Consider the medium and long-term weather forecasts to assess the potential impact of the weather on the safety and effectiveness of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters deployed at the incident
- Consider the support required for fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, including:
  - Suitably located water supplies
  - Take-off and landing areas
  - Refuelling areas
- Brief all responders regarding the areas, tasks and duration of aircraft and/or helicopter operations



- Consider requesting appropriate fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters and unmanned aircraft based on need