



Department of Public Health  
Emergency Medical Services Agency

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Policy #: 470.00  
Effective Date: 09/1993  
Revision Date: 10/2011  
Review Date: 10/2013

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This policy supersedes any other existing policy on this subject.

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Subject: **EMS AIRCRAFT UTILIZATION**

Authority: California Health and Safety Code, Division 2.5, Section 1797.220, and California Code of Regulations, Title 22, Chapter 8, "Prehospital EMS Aircraft Regulations".

Definitions: **Air Ambulance** - Means a rotor or fixed wing aircraft specially constructed, modified or equipped, and used for the primary purpose of responding to emergency calls and transporting critically ill or injured patients, whose medical flight crew has a minimum of two (2) attendants certified and licensed in advanced life support.

**Authorizing EMS Agency** - Means the local EMS agency that approves utilization of specific EMS Aircraft within its jurisdiction.

**Classifying EMS Agency** - means the local EMS agency in the jurisdiction of origin except for aircraft operated by the California Highway Patrol, California Department of Forestry, or the California National Guard, which shall be classified by the State EMS Authority.

**CAMTS** – Commission on Accreditation of Medical Transport Systems.

**Designated EMS Aircraft Dispatch Center** - Means the Authorized Merced County EMS Dispatch Center.

**EMS Aircraft** - For the purpose of this policy, except where otherwise noted, EMS Aircraft shall mean a rotor type air ambulance.

**Helicopter** - Shall mean a rotor type aircraft meeting the qualifications of an air ambulance.

**Non-Simultaneous Helicopter Dispatch Zones** - Means those areas within Merced County where an air ambulance shall be dispatched based upon probable need, as identified herein.

**Simultaneous Helicopter Dispatch Zone** - Means those areas of Merced County where an air ambulance shall be dispatched simultaneously with responding ground units for specific incidents as defined herein.

APPROVED:

ON-FILE

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***Recognized First Responder or First Responder*** - Shall be limited to duly authorized employees of Public Safety Agencies operating within Merced County or any incorporated political subdivision thereof.

Purpose: To maximize the effective and efficient use of EMS aircraft within the Merced County EMS Area.

Policy: EMS Aircraft shall be utilized within the Merced County EMS System as defined in this policy.

1. EMS Aircraft Dispatch

A. The Authorized Merced County EMS Dispatch Center shall be designated as the EMS Aircraft Dispatch Center (hereinafter "dispatch center"). For each EMS aircraft dispatched, the dispatch center shall serve as the communications coordination center between responding EMS ground units and EMS aircraft responding to EMS incidents within the jurisdiction of the EMS Agency.

B. The dispatch center shall maintain a listing of all EMS aircraft services authorized by the EMS Agency for service within Merced County. The dispatch center shall maintain records of all EMS aircraft requests/utilization within Merced County. The minimum data to be recorded for each EMS aircraft request shall include:

1. date of request
2. time of request
3. requesting party
4. canceling party (if appropriate)
5. time on scene
6. scene location (including Merced County EMS Grid Number)
7. patient destination

C. EMS aircraft dispatch personnel shall be oriented to aircraft dispatch techniques as approved by the EMS Agency. The dispatch center shall ensure that it is updated, at a minimum, at the beginning of each shift as to the availability/status of authorized EMS aircraft.

D. An EMS helicopter shall be dispatched concomitantly with the closest available ground ambulance when weather conditions and helicopter availability allow, and when the incident location and the presumed nature of the injury are appropriate. With the exception of emergency interfacility transports arranged by physicians, the dispatch center will dispatch a helicopter by any of the following methods:

1. Simultaneous Dispatch
2. On Scene Request
3. Responding Enroute

E. For the purpose of helicopter dispatching, all EMS Grid designations within Merced County shall be considered "Simultaneous Helicopter Dispatch Areas." The only exceptions are those EMS Grids in the greater Merced-Atwater area with a ten minute

ambulance response time designation, which are designated as "Non-Simultaneous Helicopter Dispatch Areas."

## 2. Simultaneous Helicopter Dispatch

The dispatch center shall simultaneously dispatch the closest ground ambulance and first responder, as well as an authorized helicopter for all EMS incidents when the incident occurs within a Simultaneous Helicopter Dispatch area and the reporting party information indicates that one of the following may exist:

- \*\* a) Penetrating trauma to the head or trunk
- b) Fall greater than 20 feet
- \* c) Auto vs Pedestrian
- \* d) Auto vs Bicycle/Motorcycle
- \* e) Motorcycle accidents
- \* f) MVA with high speed potential
- g) Explosions
- h) Electrocution
- i) Multi-Casualty Incident
- j) Industrial/Agricultural with critical injuries
  
- \*\* A simultaneous helicopter dispatch shall occur, regardless of geographic location.
  
- \* May exclude simultaneous helicopter if reported as minor injuries only, dispatcher discretion.

## 3. On-Scene Request

An ALS ground unit and an EMS air ambulance shall be dispatched upon the request of any fire or law enforcement agency, ambulance personnel, other first responders or any public safety officer if any of the following conditions exist:

- A. Potential life or limb threatening injuries.
- B. Any other incident where additional ALS assistance is needed.

## 4. Request by ALS Ground Ambulance

- A. Responding ALS personnel that have knowledge of the scene or additional information beyond that provided by the dispatch center, may request the dispatch of an air ambulance. The requesting crew shall coordinate helicopter requests with the On-scene Incident Commander.
- B. After assessing the scene, the ALS personnel shall immediately verify the need, or lack thereof, of the air ambulance, and either continue, cancel, or initiate the air ambulance response, as appropriate.

## 5. Required Information for EMS Aircraft Dispatch

The helicopter shall be dispatched as soon as essential information is received from the reporting party. Prior to disconnect with the reporting party, dispatchers at the Merced County

EMS Dispatch Center shall attempt to obtain as much of the following information as possible from the individuals/organization requesting a helicopter.

- A. Requesting agency, location, number of patients, type of incident (e.g. hazmat, MVA, etc.) and extent of injuries.
- B. Landing site information (if possible).
  - 1) coordinates.
  - 2) landmarks identifiable from the air.
- C. Terrain and obstacles.
- D. Weather conditions.
  - 1) wind direction and speed.
  - 2) visibility and temperature.
- E. Radio frequencies of responding ground units.

This information shall be relayed, as requested, to the EMS aircraft service dispatcher when requesting an EMS aircraft to respond to an EMS incident within this County.

6. EMS Aircraft Communications

- A. The EMS Dispatch Center shall facilitate communications between ground personnel and EMS aircraft, including updated information regarding ground radio frequencies, units dispatched to the scene, the designated ground contact and any other information requested by an EMS aircraft during the course of their emergency operations relative to Merced County EMS incidents.
- B. Once an EMS aircraft is on scene, the ground crew in charge of patient care on scene shall, advise the EMS aircraft crew of the patient condition and the designated receiving facility.
- C. All Authorized EMS Aircraft Providers shall ensure that their radio communications equipment is capable of direct voice communications with all helicopter receiving facilities located within their normal operational range, to include all helicopter receiving facilities located within the Mountain-Valley and Fresno, Kings, Madera EMS Agency Jurisdictions.

7. EMS Aircraft Operational Dispatch and Flight Following Service

- A. Each Authorized EMS Aircraft Service shall maintain or contract with an operations dispatch center 24 hours/day, 7 days/week. Said dispatch center shall be capable of confirming the provider's ability to respond to an EMS incident upon notification from the Merced County EMS Dispatch Center.
- B. Each EMS Aircraft Service shall maintain a log of all EMS aircraft requests, relative to their operations within Merced County. The minimum data to be recorded shall include:
  - 1) Date of request.
  - 2) Location of Incident.
  - 3) Type of Incident.
  - 4) Time of Call (TOC)

- 5) Time Dispatched (DSP)
- 6) Enroute Time (ER)
- 7) On scene (OS)
- 8) Enroute hospital (ERH)
- 9) On scene hospital (OSH)

This information shall be relayed, as requested, to the EMS aircraft service dispatcher when requesting an EMS aircraft to respond to an EMS incident within this County.

#### 8. Cancellation of EMS Aircraft

A. All EMS aircraft cancellations shall be coordinated by the Merced County EMS Dispatch Center. Cancellation of EMS aircraft may occur due to:

- 1) Pilot Judgment – In all such cases the Merced County EMS Dispatch Center shall be immediately notified of the cancellation, and the conditions precipitating said cancellation.
- 2) Lack of Medical Need – An EMT-1, EMT-P or recognized first responder on scene of an EMS incident, who has assessed the patient so as to determine the patient's condition, may cancel an EMS aircraft. All such cancellations shall be effected by contacting the Merced County EMS Dispatch Center and providing the reason for the cancellation and the person and agency effecting said cancellation.
- 3) Logistical and/or Safety Considerations – The Incident Commander or his or her designee may cancel the EMS aircraft when s/he feels that landing the aircraft would be unsafe, or there is no patient. Alternate landing sites shall be considered prior to cancellation.

B. Dispatchers will cancel and EMS Aircraft only after documenting:

- 1) Pilot Judgment – verify the reason for cancellation from the pilot.
- 2) Lack of Medical Need – verify from the EMS provider the following:
  - a) The name of the agency canceling the mission, and:
  - b) Confirm that the canceling agency is in scene and has examined all patients.
- 3) Logistical and/or safety considerations - verify from the calling party the following information:
  - a) The agency canceling the mission,
  - b) The logistical and/or safety considerations precipitating cancellation,
  - c) If a medical need still exists, and
  - d) That no reasonable alternate landing sites exist.

If the dispatcher at the Merced County EMS Dispatch Center cannot verify the appropriate cancellation information, the mission shall not be cancelled. The dispatcher shall notify the responding EMS aircraft that an unverified request for cancellation exists.

9. Landing Sites

- A. EMS aircraft landing sites shall conform to appropriate regulations and safety guidelines including: Federal Aviation Regulations 91.3; California Code of Regulations, Title 21, Public Works Chapter 2.5, Division of Aeronautics; National EMS Pilots Association Landing Site Guidelines and EMS Landing Site Safety Standards. Under no circumstances shall the pilot of the responding EMS aircraft be advised/notified as to the patient's age (e.g. pediatric) or severity of the patient's condition. The decision to complete or cancel the mission, including utilization of specific landing sites, shall be based solely on the pilot's judgment, relative to the safety factors involved in completing the mission.
- B. Communications shall be established and maintained with Landing Site Control personnel during all landings and take offs requiring said personnel.
- C. Landing sites to be utilized by EMS aircraft shall include:
  - 1) Heliports and/or airports meeting Title 21 requirements, or
  - 2) Sites chosen at or near the scene of an EMS incident meeting the National EMS Pilots Association Landing Site Guidelines, or
  - 3) EMS Agency designated EMS Landing Sites meeting EMS Landing Site Safety Standards.
- D. Mercy Medical Center Helistop
  - 1) For those incidents that occur in the vicinity of Mercy Medical Center, patients may be transported directly to their Helistop to rendezvous with the air ambulance. Crews transporting patients to the Mercy Helistop for air transport shall comply with the procedure below.
    - a) As soon as the decision is made to rendezvous with the air ambulance at Mercy's Helistop, the crew shall notify Mercy emergency department via Med 8 or landline. This notification must be clear that the transport to Mercy is for "rendezvous only," and that the patient is not being seen at Mercy ED.
    - b) Mercy ED will contact their Public Safety/Security Department and advise that an air ambulance rendezvous is in-bound, and they will secure the area for the ground ambulance to transfer the patient to the air ambulance.
    - c) Once on scene at the Helistop, standard helicopter safety precautions shall apply. Do not approach the helicopter until cleared to do so by the helicopter crew.
    - d) Mercy medical staff will not approach the Helistop during such rendezvous, to avoid complications with EMTALA. However, either the air or ground ambulance crew can request hospital assistance if the patient's condition deteriorates. Once hospital staff make contact with the patient, a Medical Screening Exam must occur, in compliance with EMTALA regulations, and the patient will have to be moved to the ED for treatment.

## 10. Medical Control

- A. Medical control for the scene of an EMS incident where both ground and EMS aircraft personnel are present shall be the responsibility of the base hospital normally contacted by the ground unit. All treatment decisions shall be made in accordance with the ALS Treatment Protocol Standing Orders. Patient destination decisions shall be in accordance with Triage Policy 512.25 and the Trauma Center rotational schedule. ALS flight personnel shall assist ground personnel in carrying out the decisions of the base hospital, as needed.
- B. The flight crew shall establish contact with the receiving facility as soon as practical, provide an ETA and update the patient condition. If the pilot decides that the designated receiving facility is not appropriate due to flight safety considerations, s/he shall immediately notify the original receiving facility and the new receiving facility of the change in destination. All such cases of re-routing shall be documented on a Situation Report Form and forwarded to the Merced County EMS Agency within 48 hours of any such re-route. Alternately, reports may be filed on the Agency web site at: <http://www.co.merced.ca.us/index.asp?nid=581> and clicking on the "File Incident Report" link.

## 11. Quality Improvement and Utilization Review

- A. The basis for utilizing EMS aircraft for transportation of patients from within the Merced County EMS System shall be solely due to medical need. All patients transported in such a manner shall be presumed to have injuries or an illness requiring rapid triage and transportation to appropriate critical care/trauma facilities. Such determinations shall be the responsibility of the most medically qualified individual on the scene of EMS incidents, which shall usually be an EMT-P, and shall be consistent with the Triage Protocol.
- B. Unusual occurrences, relative to EMS aircraft, shall be documented on an Agency Situation Report Form and forwarded to the EMS Agency within 48 hours of occurrence. Alternately, reports may be filed on the Agency web site as noted in Section 10B, above.
- C. EMS Aircraft Providers shall ensure that a copy of all patient care report forms for transportations originating within Merced County are forwarded to the Merced County EMS Agency on a monthly basis.

## 12. EMS Rescue Aircraft Utilization

- A. In accordance with the California Code of Regulations, Title 22, Section 100302 (e), ground ALS crews may transfer a patient to the flight crew of an aircraft with lower level of certification/care capabilities when it is determined that rapid transport is the primary treatment of choice for a critical patient. It is the primary responsibility of the EMS dispatch center to dispatch authorized EMS aircraft when air medical assistance is indicated.
- B. If it is determined that the EMS aircraft crew is less medically qualified than the ground personnel, the Base Hospital shall be contacted to determine whether or not the aircraft crew can provide appropriate care and transportation of the patient.
- C. If Base Hospital contact is not possible, the most medically qualified individual on-scene shall make the determination as to whether the treatment needs of the patient will be best served by rapid transport via aircraft, or whether the medical care limitations of the flight crew pose too great a risk to the patient, and shall determine the appropriate mode of transport.

- D. EMS aircraft may utilize ground providers in the transport of a patient when said use will not interrupt the pattern of readiness and response services to the ground provider's service area. The EMS ground provider attending the patient during the flight shall be considered a passenger assisting the patient, and not a member of the flight crew.

13. Authorization of EMS Aircraft

- A. EMS Aircraft Service Providers must be authorized by the Local EMS Agency before they may be included in the prehospital EMS system as an air medical transport service. When an EMS Aircraft service successfully completes the authorization requirements as set forth herein, a certificate of authorization will be issued, and said provider will be included on the authorized EMS aircraft list maintained by the Merced County EMS Dispatch Center.
- B. The EMS aircraft service must submit an application for initial authorization. Completion of the application shall include documentation of self-inventory and classification in accordance with criteria required by the State EMS Authority and policies of the Merced County EMS Agency.
- C. The EMS aircraft service shall submit a copy of their air taxi/commercial operators certificate (Public Safety agencies are exempt from the certification requirements but must document consistency with FAA requirements). The EMS Agency may request a copy of the enforcement and accident history of the operator from the FAA Flight Standards District Office issuing the certificate.
- D. The EMS aircraft service shall submit a copy of its certificate of insurance. The policy must include a 20 million dollar minimum liability and a one (1) million dollar minimum malpractice liability. The EMS Aircraft service is required to notify the EMS Agency thirty (30) days prior to a reduction or change in its liability coverage. Public Safety agencies are exempt from the certification requirement, but must document their ability to assume liability for their actions.
- E. The EMS Aircraft Service shall be accredited by CAMTS. Public Safety agencies are not bound by CAMTS Safety Standards, but are required to document equivalency.
- F. All EMS Aircraft Service providers based outside of the Merced County EMS Area of jurisdiction shall provide proof of classification and authorization from the Local EMS Agency with jurisdiction in their area of origin.
- G. To be authorized as an EMS Aircraft Provider "Regularly" serving the Merced County EMS System, the aircraft provider shall agree to participate in this system as delineated in this policy, relative to simultaneous dispatch of EMS aircraft, and serve those areas of the County as deemed appropriate by the Agency, based on the providers base of operations and travel time to specific areas of the County.
- H. All EMS Aircraft Service Providers whose "Jurisdiction of Origin" is outside of the Merced County EMS Area shall assure that patient records for all transports originating from the Merced County EMS Area contain the required data elements as delineated in the California Code of Regulations, Title 22, Section 100164, and shall forward a copy of all patient care reports for those transports which originate within the Merced County EMS System.



- I. The EMS aircraft service provider shall be required to have a written agreement with the Agency to participate in the Merced County EMS System, which shall clearly delineate the provider's roles and responsibilities as an EMS aircraft provider within this system, as well as adherence to all applicable state, federal and local policies, procedures, regulations and safety guidelines.
- J. Upon successful completion of Section 14. (A-I), the Merced County EMS Agency shall issue a certificate of authorization to the EMS aircraft service.

14. Requirement for Written Agreement with the EMS Agency

- A. In order to maintain authorization, EMS Aircraft Service Providers shall execute a written agreement with the Merced County EMS Agency, as a requirement for participation in the prehospital patient care and transport system, assuring compliance with all applicable state regulations and local policies and procedures. The agreement shall include:
  - accreditation by CAMTS
  - the provision of requested quality assurance information
  - the maintenance of communications as specified by the Agency
  - confirmation of the certification level of the aircraft service, as certified by the EMS agency of jurisdiction in the provider's area of origin
  - the level of participation, relative to simultaneous dispatching
  - the maintenance of drug and equipment standards, as specified by the Agency
  - adherence to all other EMS system guidelines, as appropriate
- B. Upon completion of the authorization process as outlined in Section 14 (A-I), the Agency shall negotiate with the EMS aircraft service provider for the execution of the above referenced agreement. No EMS aircraft service provider shall be considered for regular service within the Merced County EMS system until said agreement has been