

CAL FIRE AVIATION PROGRAM

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF
FORESTRY & FIRE PROTECTION

AVIATION PROGRAM



CAL FIRE's world-renowned aviation program responds to thousands of wildland fires across California annually. The operational fleet features Lockheed Martin C-130 Hercules and Grumman S-2T airtankers, Bell UH-1H Super Huey and Sikorsky S-70i FIREHAWK helicopters, and North American OV-10A (including one D-model) Bronco Air Tactical aircraft. These assets, along with highly skilled crew members, pilots, and support staff, are strategically positioned at one airtanker base, 13 air attack bases, 10 CAL FIRE helitack bases, and one joint CAL FIRE/San Diego County Sheriff helitack base. This distribution allows aircraft to reach even the most remote State Responsibility Area (SRA) fires within approximately 20 minutes, supporting the goal of containing 95% of all fires to 10 acres or less. With nearly 70 fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, CAL FIRE operates the largest aerial firefighting fleet in the world.

Current Operational Fleet

AIRCRAFT	TYPE	GALLONS CARRIED	MAXIMUM OPERATING SPEED
Air Tactical Aircraft			
16	Rockwell OV-10	N/A	258 mph
3	King Air A200	N/A	345 mph
Airtankers			
23	Grumman S-2T	1,200	270 mph
3	Lockhead C-130H	4,000	368 mph
Helicopters			
16	Sikorsky S70i CAL FIRE HAWK	1,000	160 mph
7	Bell UH-1H Super Huey	360	126 mph
Total Aircraft: 68			

Future Operational Fleet

AIRCRAFT	TYPE	GALLONS CARRIED	MAXIMUM OPERATING SPEED
Air Tactical Aircraft			
16	Rockwell OV-10	N/A	258 mph
3	King Air A200	N/A	345 mph
Airtankers			
23	Grumman S-2T	1,200	270 mph
7	Lockhead C-130H	4,000	368 mph
Helicopters			
16	Sikorsky S70i CAL FIRE HAWK	1,000	160 mph
7	Bell UH-1H Super Huey	360	126 mph
Total Aircraft: 72			

Fire Retardant

A slurry mix consisting of a chemical salt compound, water, clay or a gum-thickening agent, and a coloring agent. An S-2T can carry 1,200 gallons and C-130 can carry 4,000 gallons.

Staffing

Nearly 50 CAL FIRE personnel lead the aviation program, overseeing policy, compliance, safety, training, and maintenance. A broader team of nearly 200 mechanics, airtanker pilots, and staff ensures mission readiness with a commitment to operational excellence.

Pilots

Our fleet is operated by seasoned pilots stationed across the state at air attack, airtanker, and helitack bases to ensure rapid response. They are supported by a staff of instructor and test pilots at aviation headquarters who maintain the highest standards of flight proficiency and aircraft performance.

February 2026