

CAL FIRE AVIATION PROGRAM

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF
FORESTRY & FIRE PROTECTION

AVIATION PROGRAM



With a fleet consisting of over 70 fixed and rotary wing aircraft, CAL FIRE boasts the largest civil aerial firefighting fleet worldwide. Strategically positioned across California, CAL FIRE's aircraft can be found at 14 air tanker bases, 10 CAL FIRE helitack bases, and one CAL FIRE/San Diego County Sheriff helitack base. In as little as 20 minutes, these aircraft can reach even the most remote State Responsibility Area (SRA) fires. The CAL FIRE Aviation Management Unit is located at Sacramento McClellan Airport and operates with support from contractors [Amentum](#) and [Logistics Specialties Incorporated](#) (LSI).

Using aircraft to fight California's wildland fires was first proposed in 1931, and again in the late 1940s after World War II. Between 1954-1957, CAL FIRE used several small airtankers on a Call-When-Needed basis. In 1958 CAL FIRE first contracted for airtanker services with private aviation companies. The air program continued to expand and by the early 1970s, the Department owned and operated a total of 14 piston-powered air tactical aircraft and contracted seven retardant/water dropping aircraft. Early aircraft included Grumman TBM Avengers, Grumman F7Fs, Consolidated PBVs and a Boeing B-17. Through the 1960s and the early 1970s, the CAL FIRE Aviation Program remained a section of the Department's Mobile Equipment Program. In the spring of 1974, it became its own unit and has since been known as Aviation Management Unit (AMU).

As the CAL FIRE aviation program continued to grow, the Tactical Air Operations Program (TAO) was established in 2008 to provide oversight to the operational side of CAL FIRE's Aviation Program. The TAO provides oversight to aviation training, northern and southern air attack and helitack base operations, military aviation asset coordination, wildland fire chemicals and retardant oversight and contracting, as well as uncrewed aerial systems (UAS) program development. TAO and AMU work together in close coordination to supply one of the world's largest and most effective aerial wildland firefighting fleets to protect the citizens and natural resources of California.

Fire Retardant:

A slurry mix consisting of a chemical salt compound, water, clay or a gum-thickening agent, and a coloring agent. At nine pounds per gallon, an S-2T can carry 10,800 pounds and C-130 can carry 36,000 pounds.

Staffing:

18 CAL FIRE personnel oversee the aviation program with an additional 288 Amentum and Logistics Specialties Incorporated contract employees providing mechanical, pilot and management services to the program.

Pilots:

CAL FIRE helicopters are flown by CAL FIRE pilots, while our airtankers and air tactical aircraft are flown by Amentum contract pilots.

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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
2	Lockhead C-130H	4,000	368 mph
Helicopters			
13	Sikorsky S70i CAL FIRE HAWK	1,000	160 mph
12	Bell UH-1H Super Huey	360	126 mph