

HOIST RESCUE

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF
FORESTRY & FIRE PROTECTION

AVIATION
PROGRAM



AIR
OPERATIONS



Hoist Rescue is an emergency rescue tool used to quickly rescue or retrieve individuals from remote or dangerous situations. Such incidents include remote victims that cannot easily be reached by roads and victims that may be trapped by water or fire. Hoist rescue involves a rescuer being lowered on a cable from a hovering helicopter to a victim below. After the rescuer attaches a harness to the victim, or places the victim in a stokes basket, the crew chief located within the helicopter will operate the hoist lifting both the victim and rescuer back into the helicopter. The helicopter will then transport the victim to a safe location or rendezvous with medical transportation.

The initial goal of CAL FIRE's helicopter program was fire suppression. As CAL FIRE evolved into an all-risk agency, the department identified a need to perform rescues in addition to water dropping missions.

In 1997, CAL FIRE initiated the Short Haul Rescue Program. Short Haul Rescue utilizes a helicopter to remove victims from dangerous or remote locations on a static rope. By July 1998, all CAL FIRE Helicopters and Helitack crews (approximately 180 personnel) were performing Short Haul Rescues.

In 2005, CAL FIRE's Aviation Management Unit (AMU) presented a proposal to transition from the Short Haul Rescue Program to the more efficient and safer Hoist Rescue Program. In 2006, Helicopter 301 from Hemet Ryan Air Attack Base in Riverside County was identified to be the first CAL FIRE Helicopter to be equipped with a rescue hoist and began development of the Hoist Rescue Program. In 2011, CAL FIRE officially initiated its Hoist Rescue Program statewide and by 2013 all CAL FIRE Helicopters and Helitack crews were capable of performing Hoist Rescues.

Hoist rescue training:

- The rescuer is required to complete 40 hours of manipulative and classroom training.
- The crew chief is required complete 90 hours of manipulative and classroom training.
- Emphasis is placed on the need for teamwork and safety between the pilot, crew chief, and the rescuer.
- After successful completion of the course, members must maintain their certification by demonstrating proficiency with a minimum of six hours of training every six months.

Currently, CAL FIRE helicopters perform hoist rescues during daylight hours. The addition of the S70i CAL FIRE HAWK will give CAL FIRE the ability to perform night time missions including Hoist Rescues in the future.

Performing Hoist Rescues is one of the most technical and dangerous tasks that CAL FIRE performs. It is the high level of training and coordination that allows CAL FIRE to successfully perform this rescue technique over 50 times each year throughout California.