

**CENTRAL CALIFORNIA**  
**EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES**  
 A Division of the Fresno County Department of Public Health

Manual	Emergency Medical Services Administrative Policies and Procedures	Policy Number 408
Subject	Helicopter Dispatch	Page 1 of 10
Reference	Title 22, Division 9, Chapter 8 of the California Code of Regulations; Association of Aeromedical Services	Effective: 10/10/86

I. POLICY

- A. The Fresno County EMS Communications Center is the designated helicopter dispatch center for Fresno, Kings, Madera, and Tulare Counties. Any request for EMS Helicopter services in Fresno, Kings, Madera or Tulare Counties shall be coordinated through the Fresno County EMS Communications Center. Helicopter provider agencies shall not be contacted directly for requests for medical responses except by the designated helicopter dispatch center.
- B. Consistent with State laws and regulations, the dispatch of helicopters for prehospital emergency medical services will be prioritized by levels of service (with exceptions for distance and mission type as outlined herein) with air ambulance units being utilized as the primary provider (Title 22, Division 9, Chapter 8, Article 2, §100300).
- C. Helicopter provider agencies (with the exception of CHP) shall not respond to direct requests for medical transportation in Fresno, Kings, Madera or Tulare Counties without contacting the designated ambulance dispatch center to determine if a more appropriate aircraft is available.
- D. Dispatchers shall dispatch helicopters for the purpose of emergency medical care and transportation according to approved EMS policies.
- E. In accordance with section 100306 of the California Code of Regulations, all EMS aircraft shall utilize appropriate radio frequencies for dispatch, routing, and coordination of flights. In addition, designated EMS helicopters shall have the capability of communicating with:
  - 1. Designated dispatch centers
  - 2. EMS ground units at the scene of an emergency
  - 3. Base hospitals
  - 4. Receiving hospitals
  - 5. Other appropriate facilities or agencies

Approved By EMS Division Manager	<b>Daniel J. Lynch</b> (Signature on File at EMS Agency)	Revision  <b>05/07/2024</b>
EMS Medical Director	<b>Miranda Lewis, M.D.</b> (Signature on File at EMS Agency)	

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- F. Fresno County, Kings County, Madera County, Tulare County and the Central California EMS Agency, through this policy, do not accept financial responsibility for the request and/or provision of helicopter service.

## II. DEFINITIONS

- A. Emergency Medical Services Aircraft - "Emergency Medical Services Aircraft" or "EMS Aircraft" or "EMS Helicopter" as used in this policy means any aircraft utilized for the purpose of prehospital emergency patient response and transport. EMS aircraft includes air ambulances and all categories of rescue aircraft (Title 22, Division 9, Chapter 8, Article 1, §100279).
- B. Air Ambulance - An "Air Ambulance" as used in this policy means any 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, at a minimum, two (2) attendants certified or licensed in advanced life support (Title 22, Division 9, Chapter 8, Article 1, §100280).
- C. Rescue Aircraft - "Rescue aircraft" as used in this policy means an aircraft whose usual function is not prehospital emergency patient transport, but which may be utilized, in compliance with EMS policies, for prehospital emergency patient transport when use of an air or ground ambulance is inappropriate or unavailable. Rescue aircraft includes ALS rescue aircraft, BLS rescue aircraft and Auxiliary rescue aircraft. (Title 22, Division 9, Chapter 8, Article 1, §100281).
- D. Advanced Life Support Rescue Aircraft - An "Advanced Life Support Rescue Aircraft" or "ALS Rescue Aircraft" as used in this policy means a rescue aircraft whose medical flight crew has, at a minimum, one attendant certified or licensed in advanced life support (Title 22, Division 9, Chapter 8, Article 1, §100282).
- E. Basic Life Support Rescue Aircraft - A "Basic Life Support Rescue Aircraft" or "BLS Rescue Aircraft" as used in this policy means a rescue aircraft whose medical flight crew has, at a minimum, one attendant certified as an Emergency Medical Technician-IA (EMT-IA) with at least eight hours of hospital clinical training and whose field/clinical experience specified in Section 100074(c) of Title 22, California Code of Regulations, is in the aeromedical transport of patients (Title 22, Division 9, Chapter 8, Article 1, §100283).
- F. Auxiliary Rescue Aircraft - An "Auxiliary Rescue Aircraft" as used in this policy means a rescue aircraft which does not have a medical flight crew, or whose medical flight crew do not meet the minimum requirements established for BLS rescue aircraft (Title 22, Division 9, Chapter 8, Article 1, §100284).
- G. Designated helicopter dispatch center - as used in this Chapter means an agency which has been designated by the local EMS agency for the purpose of coordinating air ambulance or rescue aircraft response to the scene of a medical emergency within the jurisdiction of the local EMS agency (Title 22, Division 9, Chapter 8, Article 1, §100291).
- H. Simultaneous Dispatch - "Simultaneous Dispatch", as used in this policy, means the dispatch of a ground ambulance and the most appropriate EMS helicopter, at the same time, to a prehospital incident.

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### III. PROCEDURE

#### A. Criteria for Requesting EMS Helicopter Services

1. An EMS helicopter response should be considered by ambulances or first responder personnel for cases meeting all of the following criteria:
  - a. The incident location must be a minimum of 30 minutes ground travel time to the appropriate hospital; and
  - b. The transport by helicopter to the appropriate hospital will be significantly more rapid than immediate ground transport (greater than 10 minutes).

**To determine the timeliness of the helicopter:** Estimate helicopter time to the scene, transport time to the hospital, and 15 minutes for loading/unloading helicopter. This estimate should be used for comparing the ground ambulance's transport time and the helicopters transport time to the hospital (consider extrication) and determining which method of transport would be the quickest for the patient.

(See example below).

Example:

Helicopter time to scene?	Helicopter transport time to hospital?	Add 15 minutes for loading and unloading patient.	Total time of patient arrival at hospital?
10 minutes	25 minutes	15 minutes	50 Minutes

Initiate ground transport with a helicopter rendezvous if the patient is ready for transport and the ETA of the helicopter is greater than five minutes (coordinate with the ambulance dispatch center).

- c. A helicopter may be used for patients meeting one or more of the following conditions:
  - (1) Trauma
    - Multi-casualty incidents (usually red or yellow priority patients)
    - Stat trauma patients
    - Spinal injuries with neurological dysfunction
    - STAT thermal burn patients and environmental exposures
    - Amputation or vascular compromise in a limb
  - (2) Medical
    - Prolonged seizures refractory to medication or seizures involving pregnancy.
    - Cardiovascular instability
    - Any injured or ill patient in an area inaccessible to, or with an extended ETA
- d. Do not utilize helicopter transport for the following patients:
  - Stable patients (except wilderness responses in the absence of ground units)
  - Cardiac arrest (medical or trauma not responding to appropriate therapy).
  - Patients contaminated by hazardous materials.
  - Patients who are violent or have behavioral emergencies.

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B. Requests for EMS Helicopter Service

1. When it is determined that an EMS helicopter is needed (based on patient condition or simultaneous dispatch criteria), the EMS helicopter should be requested through the agency's dispatch center. The request shall then be coordinated through the Fresno County EMS Communications Center.

- a. The ambulance dispatch centers used in the Central California EMS region are:

County	Designated Ambulance Dispatch Center	Phone #
Fresno, Kings, Madera	Fresno County EMS Communications Center	(559) 600-7800
Tulare County	Tulare County Consolidated Ambulance Dispatch Center (TCCAD)	(559) 687-3313 or (559) 687-3314

2. All requests for medical helicopters in Tulare County shall be made through the Tulare County Consolidated Ambulance Dispatch Center (TCCAD). TCCAD will forward the helicopter request and all pertinent information to the Fresno County EMS Communications Center.
3. Requests for EMS Helicopter services shall be from an appropriate public safety agency, EMS provider agency, hospital, or Ambulance Dispatch Center.
4. In the event of a request for an EMS helicopter response by Ski Patrol or rural/remote construction sites, initiate a dispatch if the request meets the Criteria for Requesting EMS Helicopter Services or Criteria for Simultaneous Dispatch. If it does not meet these criteria, confirm a ground unit response, and advise the requesting party.

\* If a helicopter can access the patient location or respond to a rendezvous point, follow appropriate CAD recommendation. If patient is not accessible by helicopter and cannot be moved to a rendezvous point, or if rescue equipment/maneuvers are required, contact the appropriate county's Sheriff's Department Dispatch Center.

5. Requests from other calling parties, including general public, shall be dispatched according to Medical Dispatch Protocols and EMS policies and procedures.
6. Upon receiving a request for a prehospital EMS helicopter response, the Dispatcher shall obtain the following information:
  - a. Patient condition / Type of Incident
  - b. Landing Zone Location or incident location
  - c. Ground unit I.D. and radio frequency.
7. Upon receiving a request for interfacility flights, the Dispatcher shall obtain the following information:
  - a. Location of Patient
  - b. Patient Name/Condition
  - c. Sending physician and telephone number.

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- d. Receiving hospital and physician (and telephone number).
  - e. Treatment in progress
  - f. Patient's weight.
8. Upon receiving the information required for a prehospital or interfacility request for EMS helicopter services, the Dispatcher shall immediately provide the requesting agency with the following information if available:
- a. Responding EMS Helicopter Agency Identification; and
  - b. An estimated ETA of the EMS Helicopter (The ETA given will include a five (5) minute start-up period, and estimated flight time.)

C. EMS Helicopter Selection

1. The Dispatcher will alert the most appropriate available EMS helicopter which is capable of completing the mission. (e.g., fuel, supplies, personnel etc.). An available EMS helicopter is one that is fully staffed, fueled, supplied, and prepared to **immediately** respond to any EMS helicopter request.
2. The Fresno County EMS Communications Center shall utilize a prioritized listing of EMS helicopter units. The priority for dispatching EMS Helicopters is based upon the staffing/certification level of the EMS Helicopter. The order of priority is:
  - a. Air Ambulance
  - b. ALS Rescue Aircraft
  - c. BLS Rescue Aircraft
  - d. Auxiliary Rescue Aircraft
3. Multiple requests for EMS Helicopter response will be managed in the following manner:
  - a. If a helicopter has been assigned and dispatched to an interfacility transfer or a scene flight, the helicopter may not be diverted to other calls.
 

**NOTE:** Multipurpose aircraft, such as the CHP helicopter may be diverted by the CHP Dispatch Center to other non-EMS missions in emergency situations.
  - b. For two calls received simultaneously - Send the highest-ranking helicopter to the incident site with the longest travel time to the hospital. If one of the two calls received is an interfacility transfer, respond an air ambulance instead of an air rescue unit on the transfer, if possible. If additional helicopters are available, they should be responded to the additional requests.
4. High altitude responses in the mountains of Fresno, Madera, and Tulare Counties - In the event that all available EMS helicopters are unable to respond to an incident due to the high elevation of the incident, the ambulance dispatch center shall contact the Sheriff's office for that County for assistance in acquiring appropriate helicopter resources.

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D. EMS Helicopter Response

1. Fresno/Kings/Madera/Tulare-based EMS Helicopters

- a. If an ALS helicopter, other than the highest-ranking available helicopter, is in-flight and notifies the Dispatcher that it has a shorter response time than the primary helicopter, assign the closer helicopter to the response. Document the location of the in-flight helicopter.
- b. Helicopters Based Outside Fresno/Kings/Madera/Tulare

The Fresno County EMS Communications Center will notify EMS helicopter agencies based outside of Fresno, Kings, Madera or Tulare Counties by telephone. These helicopters may be contacted by radio if they are in the Fresno/Kings/Madera/Tulare area and monitoring the frequency.

2. Response Information

The ambulance dispatch center shall provide the following information to the responding EMS helicopter:

a. Prehospital Responses

- (1) Patient condition / Type of Incident
- (2) Landing Zone Location or incident location
- (3) Ground unit I.D. and radio frequency.

b. Interfacility Transfer Information

- (1) Patient Name/Condition
- (2) Sending physician and telephone number
- (3) Receiving hospital and physician (and telephone number)
- (4) Treatment in progress
- (5) Patient's weight
- (6) Upon receipt of an interfacility transfer request, the EMS helicopter flight crew shall contact the appropriate facility (Base Hospital or Receiving Hospital) via phone or radio to confirm acceptance of patient or receive special instructions.

3. The EMS Helicopter flight crew shall perform preflight procedures as rapidly as possible and initiate lift-off without delay. A lift off or enroute status is defined as the time when the helicopter is cleared by the Control Tower or is actually moving towards the response location.
4. The EMS Helicopter flight crew shall immediately notify the requesting ambulance dispatch center and the Fresno County EMS Communications Center if unable to respond to the call.
5. The EMS Helicopter Flight crew shall notify the Fresno County EMS Communications Center if they are unable to lift off due to any delay (fuel, maintenance, or crew not available). The Dispatcher shall immediately notify the next appropriate EMS helicopter based off CAD recommendation.
6. The Dispatcher shall immediately notify the requesting communications center and/or agency of any potential delay of the EMS helicopter.

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7. In cases where the helicopter is transporting to an airport to rendezvous with a ground unit for ground transportation (e.g., transport to a hospital without a helipad), coordinate the ground unit response based upon the helicopter ETA. The ground unit will generally transport the flight crew and the patient to the hospital.
  8. Helicopters shall not be dispatched on scene flights in lieu of ground ambulance services.  
  
Exceptions: In coordination with the respective county's Sheriff's Department, the EMS Communications Center may dispatch a helicopter without a ground unit to areas inaccessible by a ground unit (Policy #410). Initiate the dispatch of a ground ambulance until confirmation of helicopter response is made. (Notify EMS Agency staff)
  9. If a helicopter can access the patient location or respond to a rendezvous point, follow CAD recommendation for helicopter assignment. If patient is not accessible by helicopter and cannot be moved to a rendezvous point, or if rescue equipment/maneuvers are required, contact the appropriate county's Sheriff's Department Dispatch Center.
  10. Responding EMS Helicopters shall maintain direct radio communications with the requesting designated ambulance dispatch center for that county and advise them of helicopter status, including:
    - a. Enroute
    - b. Arrival At Scene
    - c. Depart Scene and Destination
    - d. At Hospital
- E. Simultaneous Dispatch
1. The simultaneous dispatch of an EMS helicopter and a ground ambulance shall occur in Fresno, Kings, Madera, and Tulare Counties when the following criteria are met:
    - a. The primary EMS Helicopter for that zone is available for immediate response; and
    - b. The incident site is outside the metro Fresno/Clovis area (all metro zones, and North Central zones N20 through N99 - **NOTE:** exception – Zones 006 & 007 if ground unit ETA exceeds 10 minutes); and
    - c. The incident site is not within a city where an available ambulance is stationed; and
    - d. The patient's presumptive patient condition meets the following:

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Description
Burns - Unconscious (do not send if patient is in cardiac arrest)
Burns - SEVERE DYSPNEA
Burns - Not Alert
Burns - $\geq$ 18% body area
Convulsions/Seizures - Pregnant
Diving Accident
Industrial Accident - Life Status Questionable
Industrial Accident - Caught in Machinery
GSW/Stabbing - Unconscious (do not send if patient is in cardiac arrest)
GSW/Stabbing - Not Alert
GSW/Stabbing - Central Wound
GSW/Stabbing - Multiple Wounds
GSW/Stabbing - Multiple Victims
MVA - Major Incident (Bus, Train, Plane)
MVA - High Mechanism (Head-on, Rollover, Auto vs. Ped, Motorcycle, etc.)

2. If information becomes available which meets the criteria for simultaneous dispatch and an ambulance is enroute, immediately initiate the dispatch of an EMS Helicopter and notify ground ambulance of EMS helicopter response and ETA.
  3. If the Dispatcher has reasonable cause to believe that the condition of the patient is critical, and the response of an EMS helicopter meets the criteria for response, but is not listed under simultaneous dispatch, the Dispatcher, with supervisor or lead dispatcher approval, may simultaneously respond the EMS helicopter.
  4. For incidents which do not meet the criteria for simultaneous dispatch and there is not a request for helicopter response, a helicopter crew may, on their own initiative, make a fly by of the incident after notification to the EMS Communications Center and confirmation by the ambulance dispatch center that no helicopter response is needed per protocol. There will not be an EMS incident number issued unless there is a request for helicopter service. However, if the helicopter lands and provides EMS services, an incident number should be assigned.
- F. Procedure for Cancelling Helicopter Units
1. Cancellation by Helicopter Crew
 

The flight crew may cancel the flight for safety considerations or mechanical issues.



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2. Cancellation of Scene Flights

Scene flights may be cancelled by public safety agencies, EMS provider agencies, EMS Agency staff or other approved requesting parties who are involved with, and at the scene of the incident. If canceled by an agency other than the original requesting agency, the Dispatcher will notify the original requesting agency of the cancellation.

3. Cancellation of Interfacility Transfers

- a. Helicopters may be cancelled by the sending hospital. If the individual requesting the cancellation is different than the requesting party, ensure that requesting party is made aware of the cancellation.
- b. If the receiving hospital wishes to cancel or divert the helicopter, have the helicopter directly contact the sending hospital to clarify the situation.

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## EMS Helicopter Listing – Out of Area Resources (In Order of Proximity to FYI Airport)

**NORTH VALLEY**

AGENCY	BASE	TYPE of SERVICE	LEVEL of STAFFING	SPECIAL MISSION CONSIDERATIONS	TELEPHONE
Mercy Air-32	Merced	ALS Air Ambulance	1 – RN 1 – EMT-P		(800) 305-5433
CALSTAR-12	Modesto	ALS Air Ambulance	1 – RN 1 – EMT-P		(800) 252-5050
PHI-41	Modesto	ALS Air Ambulance	1 – RN 1 – EMT-P		(800) 421-6111
PHI-42	Sonora	ALS Air Ambulance	1 – RN 1 – EMT-P		(800) 421-6111
CALSTAR-2	Gilroy	ALS Air Ambulance	2 – RN		(800) 252-5050
CALSTAR-5	Salinas	ALS Air Ambulance	2 – RN		(800) 252-5050
CALSTAR-1	Concord	ALS Air Ambulance	2 – RN		(800) 252-5050
Life Flight	Stanford	ALS Air Ambulance	2 – RN		(800) 321-7828
CHP H-20	Sacramento	ALS Air Rescue	1 – EMT-P	Limited hours of availability	(916) 920-6210 or CHP – Fresno

**SOUTH VALLEY**

AGENCY	BASE	TYPE of SERVICE	LEVEL of STAFFING	SPECIAL MISSION CONSIDERATIONS	TELEPHONE
Mercy Air-15	Bakersfield	ALS Air Ambulance	1 – RN 1 – EMT-P	2 Patient Capacity	(800) 305-5433
CHP H-70	Paso Robles	ALS Air Rescue	1 – EMT-P	Limited hours of availability	(916) 920-6210 Or CHP – Fresno
LA County Fire	Los Angeles	ALS Air Rescue	2 – EMT-P		(323) 881-6183
San Bernardino Sheriff	San Bernardino	ALS Air Rescue	1 – EMT-P		Fresno County Sheriff
CALSTAR-7	Santa Maria	ALS Air Ambulance	2 - RN		(800) 252-5050
CALSTAR-5	Salinas	ALS Air Ambulance	2 – RN		(800) 252-5050
Kern County Sheriff	Kern	BLS Rescue	1 – EMT-I		(661) 868-4055
Kern County Fire	Kern	BLS Rescue	1 – EMT-I		(661) 868-4055
Mercy Air	Mojave	ALS	1 – RN 1 – EMT-P	2 patient Capacity	(800) 305-5433
CDF	Various Location	Auxiliary Rescue			Fresno County Fire