

	EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES AGENCY	POLICY NUMBER	470
	A Division of the Merced County Department of Public Health		
SUBJECT: EMS AIRCRAFT UTILIZATION		Effective Date:	04/2023
References: California Health and Safety Code, Division 2.5, Section 1797.220 California Code of Regulations, Title 22, Chapter 8, "Prehospital EMS Aircraft Regulations"		Initial Date:	09/2023
		Next Review Date:	04/2025
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I. POLICY

- A. The Merced County EMS Dispatch Center is the designated helicopter dispatch center for Merced County. Any request for EMS Helicopter services in Merced County shall be coordinated through the Merced County EMS Dispatch 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 shall not respond to direct requests for medical transportation in Merced County 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. Merced County and the Merced County 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).

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EMS Administrator

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EMS Medical Director

- 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 (EMT) 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.
- I. EMS Agency - Means the local EMS agency that approves utilization of specific EMS Aircraft within its jurisdiction 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.
- J. CAMTS - Commission on Accreditation of Medical Transport Systems.
- K. First Responder - Shall be limited to duly authorized employees of Public Safety Agencies operating within Merced County or any incorporated political subdivision thereof.
- L. Standby Zones - Predetermined areas within the county where a Merced County based air ambulance shall be dispatched and wait until EMS, or other approved ground resources arrive at scene to decide to launch, or rendezvous at their respective base. If outside the standby zones, the closest air ambulance will be dispatched and launch to the scene or designated Landing Zone.

III. PROCEDURE**A. EMS Aircraft Dispatch**

1. 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. The dispatch center shall determine when an air ambulance will be dispatched and when an air ambulance will standby or launch to scene.
2. 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:
 - a. Date of request
 - b. Time of request
 - c. Requesting party
 - d. Canceling party (if appropriate)
 - e. Time on scene
 - f. Scene location (including Merced County EMS Grid Number)
 - g. Patient destination
3. 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.
4. 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 incident are appropriate. Except for emergency interfacility transports arranged by physicians, the dispatch center will dispatch a helicopter by any of the following methods:
 - a. Simultaneous Dispatch
 - b. On Scene Request
 - c. Responding Enroute
5. For helicopter dispatching, all EMS Grid designations within Merced County shall be considered "Simultaneous Helicopter Dispatch Areas."
6. Within the predetermined standby areas of the county (see attachment B and C), a Merced County based air ambulance will be dispatched and wait until EMS ground resources arrive at scene to decide to launch, or rendezvous at their base. If outside the standby zones, the closest air ambulance will be dispatched simultaneously and launch to the scene or to the designated Landing Zone.
 - a. When there is not a ground resource available in the westside standby area the closest aircraft to the incident will be dispatched simultaneously and launched to the scene or to

the designated Landing Zone.

B. Simultaneous Helicopter Dispatch

1. 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: (Refer to Helicopter Utilization Flowchart – Attachment A)
 - a. Penetrating trauma to the head or trunk
 - b. Fall greater than 20 feet
 - c. Vehicle versus Pedestrian/Bicycle
 - d. Vehicle versus Motorcycle/All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV)
 - e. Explosions
 - f. Electrocution
 - g. Multi-Casualty Incident
 - h. Industrial/Agricultural with critical injuries
 - i. Motor Vehicle Accidents with Injuries
 - j. Pin-ins
 - k. Ejections
 - l. Head-on Collisions
 - m. Watercraft Accidents with Injuries or Ejections
 - n. 2nd or 3rd Degree Burns to the Head or Trunk

NOTE: The Dispatch Center shall exclude simultaneous helicopter if:

- Reported as minor injuries
- If patient is in cardiac arrest

2. On-Scene Request

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 or illnesses.
- b. Any other incident where an EMS Air Ambulance is needed.

3. 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.
- a. 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.

4. Required Information for EMS Aircraft Dispatch

The helicopter shall be dispatched as soon as essential information is received from the reporting party. Prior to disconnecting with the reporting party, dispatchers at the Dispatch Center shall attempt to obtain as much of the following information as possible from the individuals or 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 Merced County.

5. EMS Aircraft Communications

- a. The 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 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 helicopters receiving facilities located within their normal operational range, to include all helicopter receiving facilities located within the Stanislaus EMS Agency and Central California EMS Agency Jurisdictions.

6. 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. The 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) Time Over 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 Merced County.

7. Cancellation of EMS Aircraft

- a. All EMS aircraft cancellations shall be coordinated by the Dispatch Center. Cancellation of EMS aircraft may occur due to:
- 1) Pilot Judgment – In all such cases the Dispatch Center shall be immediately notified of the cancellation, and the conditions precipitating said cancellation.
 - 2) Lack of Medical Need – An EMT, EMT-P or recognized first responder on scene of an EMS incident, who has assessed the patient to determine the patient's condition (minor injuries), may cancel an EMS aircraft. All such cancellations shall be affected by contacting the 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 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 at the 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 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.

C. Landing Sites

1. 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.
2. Communications shall be established and maintained with Landing Site Control personnel during all landings and take-offs requiring said personnel.
3. Landing sites to be utilized by EMS aircraft shall include:
 - a) Heliports and/or airports meeting California Code of Regulations, Title 21 requirements, or
 - b) Sites chosen at or near the scene of an EMS incident meeting the National EMS Pilots Association Landing Site Guidelines, or
 - c) EMS designated landing sites meeting safety standards.

D. Mercy Medical Center Helipad

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 Medical Center Helipad 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

Medical Center Helipad, the crew shall notify Mercy Medical Center emergency department via Med 8 or landline. This notification must be clear that the transport to Mercy Medical Center is for "rendezvous only," and that the patient is not being seen at Mercy Medical Center emergency department.

- b) Mercy Medical Center emergency department 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 Mercy Medical Center Helipad, standard helicopter safety precautions shall apply. Do not approach the helicopter until cleared to do so by the helicopter crew.
- d) Mercy Medical Center medical staff will not approach the Helipad during such rendezvous, to avoid complications with EMTALA. However, either the air or ground ambulance crew can request medical assistance if the patient's condition deteriorates. If medical staff contact the patient, a Medical Screening Exam must occur, in compliance with EMTALA regulations, and the patient will have to be moved to the emergency department for treatment.

2. 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. Trauma patient destination decisions shall be in accordance with Triage, **EMS Policy #402 Patient Destination** 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's condition. If the pilot decides that the designated receiving facility is not appropriate due to flight safety considerations, they shall immediately notify the original receiving facility and the new receiving facility of the change in destination.

3. 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 or access limitations. 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 a Continuous Quality Improvement report.
- c) EMS Aircraft Providers shall ensure that copies of all patient care report forms are

available for review by the Merced County EMS Agency as requested.

4. 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 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 for 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.

5. 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 and any other insurance requirements, which must meet the standard determined by the County's Risk Manager. 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 100171(e) and shall ensure a copy of all patient care reports for those transports which originate within the Merced County EMS System are available for review.
 - 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 6, the Merced County EMS Agency shall issue a certificate of authorization to the EMS aircraft service.
6. 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 EMS Agency
 - Adherence to all other EMS system guidelines, as appropriate

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- b) Upon completion of the authorization process as outlined in Section 6, 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 the said agreement has been approved.