
BACKGROUND

May 2010

Ministry of Forests and Range
Provincial Wildfire Coordination Centre

USE OF AIRCRAFT DURING FIRE SUPPRESSION

Firefighting aircraft play an integral role in wildfire suppression, but they do not put out fires. The role of aircraft is to slow and limit a fire's spread so ground crews can get in and work toward containment.

Airtankers

- B.C. currently has 12 airtankers and seven birddog aircraft working in the province. Additional support is also provided in border areas from the Yukon, Alberta and other provinces across Canada when required.
- The types of airtankers used by the Wildfire Management Branch include the Lockheed Electra (L188), Convair (CV580) and Airtractor (AT802). Additional aircraft may be used when needed.
- Airtankers have two primary roles during fire fighting; initial attack and support action.
- During an initial attack, airtankers drop fire retardant and/or foam on or near small fires. This helps limit the spread of the fires until ground crews arrive to extinguish them.
- While offering support action, airtankers use controlled drops to support ground control lines, limiting the spread of the fire and cooling hot spots. Airtankers can dampen and lower the temperature of areas during these targeted drops.
- An air attack officer – an experienced fire specialist with knowledge of air attack techniques and ground crew strategies – flies with a group of airtankers in a smaller aircraft called a “birddog.” Their role is to assess the fire and direct the airtankers to the safest, most efficient and most effective area to drop retardant.
- Airtankers are usually stationed in groups of one to three aircraft. On average, a group's combined retardant/foam capacity is approximately 10,000 litres. Sometimes a group's capacity will exceed 15,000 litres.

Helicopters

Light helicopters

- Light helicopters are primarily used for GPS mapping, infrared scanning and acting as a rotary-wing birddog or observation by the Incident Commander or fireline crews.
- They can carry one to four passengers.
- Models frequently used by the Wildfire Management Branch include the Bell 206B and the Hughes 500.

Intermediate helicopters

- Intermediate helicopters are primarily used for crew transport and for support action, including bucketing.
- They are a general-purpose aircraft, capable of carrying five to eight passengers or bucketing an average 500 litres of water or retardant.
- Models frequently used by the Wildfire Management Branch include the Bell 206 Longranger series, the Bell 407 and the A Star 350 series.

Medium helicopters

- Medium helicopters are primarily used for crew transport and bucketing support activities. Medium helicopters can be used to deliver long-term retardants to help hold a control line or suppress hot spots.
- They can carry nine to 14 passengers and can be configured with tanks or buckets holding 1,400 litres of water or retardant.
- Models frequently used by the Wildfire Management Branch include the Bell 205 and the Bell 212.

Heavy helicopters

- Heavy helicopters are primarily used for bucket support activities and delivering long-term retardants to help hold a control line or they may suppress hot spots within and outside the fire.
- Heavy helicopters carry 15 or more passengers or can be configured with tanks or buckets holding up to 9,000 litres of water or retardant.
- Models frequently used by the Wildfire Management Branch include the Bell 214B, the Sikorsky 61 and the Sikorsky 64 Skycrane. The Skycrane specifically can bucket or tank 7,500 litres alone.

To report a wildfire or unattended campfire call 1-800 663-5555 or *5555 on most cellular networks. For more information on open fire restrictions or for updates on current wildfire activity, visit www.bcwildfire.ca

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Contact: Kim Steinbart
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More information on wildfires in British Columbia is available on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/BCGovFireInfo> and Facebook at <http://facebook.com/BCForestFireInfo>

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province's news feeds using RSS, visit the Province's website at www.gov.bc.ca.