

Monterey County EMS System Policy



Policy Number: 4070
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EMS AIRCRAFT OPERATIONS

I. PURPOSE

- A. To establish guidelines for air transport and destination decisions.
- B. To authorize the use of and provide a standard of operation for EMS Aircraft services in Monterey County.
- C. To establish minimum standards for the integration of EMS Aircraft and personnel into the local EMS prehospital patient transport system as a specialized resource for the transport and care of emergency medical patients.
- D. To establish a process for addressing and resolving formal complaints regarding the integration of aircraft into the prehospital patient transport system.
- E. To designate that Monterey County EMS policies and procedures (with the exception of treatment protocols and scope of practice specifically detailed in Monterey County EMS System Policy 2001: EMS Aircraft-Based Paramedic Scope of Practice) shall apply to the EMS Aircraft flight crew as outlined in this policy.
- F. To designate that Monterey County EMS policies and procedures for record-keeping and quality improvement, shall apply to EMS aircraft operations.

II. POLICY

- A. EMS provider organizations and personnel shall follow the standards established by this policy, adhere to the requirements of Title 22, as well as follow Monterey County policies and regulations regarding patient transport and destination.
- B. EMS aircraft must be authorized by Monterey County EMS Agency in order to provide prehospital patient transport within Monterey County. Authorized EMS aircraft service providers shall comply with this and other Monterey County EMS Policies related to provision of air transport for emergency patients.
- C. Patients shall be transported to the hospital via ground ambulance unless such transport is unavailable or if ground transport is significantly longer than air transport (and this difference in time may negatively impact the patient's condition).
- D. The medical flight crew of an EMS aircraft shall have training in aeromedical transportation as specified and approved by the authorizing EMS agency.
- E. EMS Aircraft service providers shall orient their pilots and medical flight crews to the local EMS system.

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- F. A ground ambulance shall always be dispatched for scene calls. The ground ambulance shall not be cancelled until the air ambulance is off the ground and en-route to the destination hospital.
- G. In accordance with Monterey County EMS agency policies, all EMS aircraft shall have the capability of communicating with:
 - 1. Designated dispatch center(s).
 - 2. EMS ground units at the scene of an emergency.
 - 3. Designated base hospitals.
 - 4. Receiving hospitals.
 - 5. Other appropriate facilities or agencies.

III. PATIENT DESTINATION DECISIONS, ADULT AND PEDIATRIC TRAUMA

- A. Adult patients who meet criteria for classification as a Major Trauma Patient (MTP) under the Field Triage Criteria policy are to be transported to Natividad or the closest Level 2 or higher trauma center.
- B. Air transport should be considered when the anticipated transport time by ground exceeds 45 minutes. Anticipated transport times must be determined on a case-by-case basis. The decision must consider travel times, weather, road conditions, traffic volume, availability and location of air ambulance resources, and other pertinent factors.
- C. Pediatric MTPs shall be transported to a pediatric trauma center or to the destination ordered by Natividad.
- D. When possible, the landing zone (LZ) should be established in a location that is closer to Natividad rather than transporting the patient away from Natividad should air transport become unavailable.
- E. Patients requiring emergency airway management that cannot be successfully performed by EMS or EMS Aircraft providers shall be transported to the closest, most accessible emergency department.
- F. Base hospital contact with Natividad is mandatory if initial rendezvous is aborted or redirected.

IV. PATIENT DESTINATION DECISIONS, MEDICAL PATIENTS

- A. Air transport should be considered when the anticipated transport time by ground exceeds 45 minutes. Anticipated transport times must be determined on a case-by-case basis. The decision must consider travel times, weather, road conditions, traffic volume, availability and location of air ambulance resources, and other pertinent factors.
- B. When possible, the LZ should be established in a location that is closer to a local hospital rather than transporting the patient away from a local hospital should air transport become unavailable.

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- C. Patients in extremis or with an uncontrolled airway shall be transported to the closest, most accessible emergency department.

V. PROCEDURES

- A. Activation Outside the Urban Response Zone: Units responding to an incident may, prior to arrival at scene, request the response of an EMS Aircraft should they believe conditions such as distance make it likely that the EMS Aircraft will be able to respond faster than ground resources or the patient's condition requires EMS Aircraft response.
- B. EMS Aircraft Dispatch:
 - 1. EMS Aircraft will be dispatched based on the criteria listed above.
 - 2. All requests for EMS Aircraft shall be made through the County of Monterey Emergency Communications Department (ECD) or by the CALFIRE Dispatch Center through the ECD.
- C. The following information shall be given to the ECD when requesting EMS Aircraft:
 - 1. Agency name and dispatch frequency of agency requesting helicopter;
 - 2. Location and the number of patient(s);
 - 3. Type and extent of injuries, if known;
 - 4. Request for a hoist or other specialized capabilities, if needed;
 - 5. Designated Landing Zone;
 - 6. General location of nearest landing site (Thomas Bros. Page and GPS coordinates and/or significant landmarks identifiable from the air); and,
 - 7. General weather/visibility conditions.
- D. The ECD shall request an estimated time of arrival (ETA) when notified that an EMS aircraft will accept the mission. This ETA shall be provided to the Incident Commander.
- E. EMS Aircraft should not accept a mission unless there is the reasonable expectation that they will be able to complete the transport to the destination hospital. Factors including weather, fuel, or other considerations shall be taken into account.
- F. Communications:
 - 1. The ECD shall request the closest EMS Aircraft be dispatched unless the Incident Commander determines the use of a Rescue Aircraft is appropriate.
 - 2. The ECD shall advise all responding ground and air units of EMS Aircraft dispatch, estimated time of arrival, radio frequency, and/or cancellation.
 - 3. CALCORD is the preferred channel for ground-to-helicopter communication. The Incident Commander or designee, in consultation with the ECD, can identify other radio frequencies to be used.
 - 4. The EMS Aircraft shall contact the ECD when enroute to the scene to ascertain the radio frequency and contact person to be used for air-to-ground communication.

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5. The EMS Aircraft shall notify the receiving facility of their impending arrival as soon as possible prior to arrival. This notification is to include patient information and an ETA.
6. EMS Aircraft providers shall notify the ECD if a Monterey County ground ambulance is needed from the terminal airport or LZ to the receiving hospital.
7. Ambulance crews may talk directly with fire crews for coordination of EMS Aircraft requests. The ECD shall advise the EMS Aircraft Dispatch Center(s) if multiple aircraft are providing support to the incident.

G. Cancellation of EMS Aircraft/Ground Providers

1. The responding ground ambulance shall not be canceled until the EMS Aircraft has departed the scene with the patient on board. Only the Incident Commander may cancel the EMS Aircraft. This decision should be made after consultation with the ground ALS provider and when it is determined that transport is no longer needed or ground transport is appropriate.
2. The Incident Commander's decision to cancel the requested EMS Aircraft should be based upon the total pre-hospital time from dispatch to arrival at the hospital, patient's medical condition, severity of injury, and/or safety and environmental conditions.
3. The EMS Aircraft crew may transfer responsibility for patient care to a ground ambulance if no interventions beyond the Monterey County Paramedic Scope of Practice have been utilized, and if both parties are in agreement.

H. Air and Ground Ambulance Rendezvous:

1. In the event that an EMS Aircraft is unable to land at the scene, consideration shall be given by the Incident Commander or designee to arrange for a rendezvous at a pre-designated LZ. The ground ALS transport provider shall be consulted.
2. Following Initiation of Ambulance Transport:
 - a) If patient transport is initiated by the ground ambulance but original ground ETA becomes extended, rendezvous at an approved LZ may be initiated by ambulance personnel when (1) patient condition deteriorates, (2) traffic conditions are prohibitive, or (3) unit develops mechanical failure. Monterey County Emergency Communications Center shall be notified.
 - b) If circumstances preclude EMS Aircraft from landing at an approved LZ, the ground ALS transport provider should request a public safety agency response to assist in securing and preparing the selected LZ.
3. Only personnel trained in EMS Aircraft landing procedures shall be utilized to determine the LZ and assist in landing the EMS Aircraft.

I. Medical Control

1. Each EMS Aircraft provider shall have a designated Flight Medical Director.

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- J. EMS Aircraft that do not have a medical flight crew shall not transport patients unless accompanied by medically-qualified ground EMS personnel. Ground ambulance personnel shall obtain approval from the on-duty supervisor prior to transport.
- K. Helicopter Safety:
 - 1. All first responder and ambulance provider personnel shall be trained in helicopter safety and landing procedures.
 - 2. Scene security is of prime importance. The agency coordinating the landing shall ensure the LZ is secure and safe.
 - 3. The EMS Aircraft pilot shall have final authority as to the safe operation of the air transport. If the pilot deems that patient transport by EMS Aircraft would be unsafe, the patient will be transported by ground ambulance.
 - 4. Ground personnel shall not approach the EMS Aircraft unless directed to do so by EMS Aircraft crew. When approaching or departing the helicopter, ground personnel shall not lift anything higher than their head nor shall they at any time approach or depart a helicopter from the rear or from the uphill side when the aircraft is landed on a slope.
 - 5. Hats, helmets, turnouts, or any loose items are to be secured or removed prior to approaching the helicopter. Any removable objects shall be stripped from the gurney when approaching the helicopter.

VI. AUTHORIZATION OF AN AIR AMBULANCE

- A. Air Ambulance and Air Rescue service providers including any company, lessee, agency (excluding agencies of the federal government), provider, owner, operator who provides or makes available prehospital air transport or medical personnel either directly or indirectly or any hospital where an EMS aircraft is based, housed, or stationed permanently or temporarily shall adhere to all federal, state and local statutes, ordinances, policies, and procedures related to EMS aircraft operations, including qualifications of flight crews and aircraft maintenance.
- B. EMS Aircraft service providers shall request authorization to operate in the County of Monterey from the Monterey County EMS Agency. The written request shall include a statement that the EMS Aircraft service provider will follow Monterey County policies regarding EMS aircraft. In addition, service providers will agree to provide an electronic Patient Care Report (ePCR) to the EMS Agency for each patient transported from or within Monterey County (see Monterey County EMS System Policy 6180 – Patient Care Records). The request shall also include the classification and location of aircraft that are proposed to be available to Monterey County.
- C. EMS Aircraft service providers shall provide a copy of the PCR for all patients transported from or within the County of Monterey to the Monterey County EMS Agency within 10 business days for QI purposes. EMS Aircraft PCR's will be reviewed by EMS Agency staff on a regular basis.

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VII. FORMAL COMPLAINTS

- A. Complaints regarding the integration of EMS Aircraft into the EMS system shall be handled by the Monterey County EMS Agency.
- B. EMS Aircraft service providers shall follow Monterey County EMS System Policy #6020 (Unusual Occurrence Reporting) for reporting of all complaints or other unusual occurrences.

END OF POLICY