

State of California
CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES
Fire and Rescue Division

OPERATIONS BULLETIN #46

Subject: Federal Fire Agencies Requesting Closest Local Government Helicopter(s), Ordering Process – PILOT PROGRAM

PURPOSE

To provide guidance to Operational Area Fire and Rescue Coordinators, Region Fire and Rescue Coordinators, and their associated dispatch centers regarding a pilot program for processing local government helicopter requests within the ordering system.

HISTORY

The Fire Resource Ordering Process Workgroup recognized that the local government helicopter ordering process could be streamlined by allowing a Geographic Area Coordination Center (GACC) to place a request directly to an adjacent Cal OES Regional Dispatch Center for the closest helicopter response. This reduces the number of touchpoints in the ordering flow and results in a more efficient process for securing the closest helicopter response for a federal wildland fire.

Pursuant to Government Code §§ 8550 and 8600 of the California Emergency Services Act, Cal OES has the responsibility and authority to coordinate response and recovery operations within each Mutual Aid Region to ensure unified, effective, and accountable emergency management statewide.

Cal OES is responsible for coordinating mutual aid activities, tracking resource status and availability, and maintaining situational awareness statewide. Fragmented coordination outside established Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) and Mutual Aid System processes can create confusion, conflict with resource ordering, and weaken the effectiveness of California's Mutual Aid System.

Accordingly, this effort is being implemented as a pilot program to evaluate operational effectiveness, coordination impacts, resource accountability, and the ability to accurately assess values at risk before a broader implementation is considered.

GUIDANCE

Effective June 5, 2026, Cal OES Fire and Rescue Regions are authorized to receive and process requests from the Northern and Southern GACCs for the closest local government helicopters. Requests received for federal wildland fire missions are presumed to fall under the California Fire Assistance Agreement (CFAA). It is the responsibility of the Cal OES Fire and Rescue Region and/or Fire and Rescue Operational Area to confirm CFAA applicability if it is not articulated in the request.

PROCEDURE

Cal OES Region Fire and Rescue Coordinator

If the Region Coordinator and/or dispatch center receives a request for a helicopter, determine the closest available helicopter if it is not already specified. Send the request to the appropriate Operational Area in the Resource Ordering Program. If the request is sent directly to the Region dispatch center, the center is to follow up with a notification to the Region Fire and Rescue Coordinator. The dispatch center or Region Coordinator shall also notify the Cal OES Fire Duty Chief at 916.845.8670.

Cal OES Operational Area (Op Area) Fire and Rescue Coordinator

Upon receipt of a helicopter request from your Region Fire and Rescue Coordinator and/or dispatch center, notify the respective Fire Department agency and assign (“fill”) the helicopter in the resource ordering system. If the helicopter is not available, communicate this to the OES Region and return (“UTF”) the request.

Pilot Feedback

The survey form will collect feedback on the efficiency, timeliness, and any challenges encountered during helicopter mobilization using the modified ordering process.

After each use of this method, the Cal OES Region Coordinator or dispatch center, together with a representative from the respective Geographic Area Coordination Center (GACC), will jointly complete a [survey form](#) documenting their observations.

