

California Department of Forestry & Fire Protection



CAL FIRE AVIATION PROGRAM

In support of its ground forces, CAL FIRE has an air fleet of airtankers, helicopters and airtactical planes. From 13 air attack and nine helitack bases located statewide, aircraft can reach most fires within 20 minutes. The airtactical aircraft fly overhead directing the airtankers and helicopters to critical areas of the fire for retardant and water drops. While both airtankers and helicopters are equipped to carry fire retardant and water, the helicopters can also transport firefighters, equipment and injured personnel.

NUMBER	TYPE	GALLONS CARRIED	MAXIMUM OPERATING SPEED
AIRTANKERS			
23	S-2T airtanker	1,200	235 knots (270 mph)
HELICOPTERS			
11	UH-1H Super Huey	320	110 knots (126 mph)
AIRTACTICAL AIRCRAFT			
14	Rockwell OV-10A airplane	NA	225 knots (258 mph)

*CAL FIRE keeps one S-2T airtanker, two helicopters and one OV-10 airtactical aircraft in Sacramento for maintenance relief.



The retardant used to slow or retard the spread of a fire is a slurry mix consisting of a chemical salt compound, water, clay or a gum- thickening agent, and a coloring agent. At nine pounds per gallon, an S-2T can carry 10,800 pounds.



The average annual budget of the CAL FIRE Aviation Program is about \$20 million. A total of 18 CAL FIRE personnel oversee the program with an additional 130 contract employees providing mechanical, pilot and management services to the program.



All CAL FIRE helicopters are flown by CAL FIRE pilots, while airtankers and airtactical aircraft are flown by contract pilots.