

SUBJECT: AIR AMBULANCE DISPATCH CENTER DESIGNATION/  
DISPATCH OF AIR AMBULANCE

Date: 07/01/2016

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- I. **Authority:** Health and Safety Code, Sections 1797.204, 1797.206, 1797.218, and 1798; California Code of Regulations, Title 22, Division 9, Chapter 8.
- II. **Purpose:** To provide for the coordination of EMS aircraft response within San Diego County.
- III. **Definitions:**

**Air Ambulance:** any rotor aircraft specially constructed, modified or equipped, and used for the primary purposes of responding to emergency calls and transporting critically ill or injured patients whose medical flight crew has at a minimum of two (2) attendants certified or licensed in advanced life support, one of whom is a Registered Nurse (RN).

**Primary Response Air Ambulance:** is an air ambulance that is permitted by the County of San Diego to respond to prehospital scene locations.

**Alert:** condition wherein a requesting agency has requested that an air ambulance be placed on standby in anticipation of a response.

**Closest Most Appropriate:** defined as a County of San Diego permitted Primary Response Air Ambulance based within the borders of San Diego County utilizing a map grid system. The air ambulance with the shortest response time to more than 50% of the map grid encompassing the incident requesting service as determined by the CAD shall be dispatched utilizing the specific aircraft designation, i.e Air Rescue 1 or Air Rescue 2.

**Designated Dispatch Center:** 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.

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**Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA):** dispatch, pre-flight, launch, and in-flight response time to a scene.

**Launch:** condition wherein a requesting agency has requested that an air ambulance respond to an incident.

**Responding:** condition wherein the air ambulance flight crew is leaving quarters, preparing the helicopter for flight and flying to the incident scene.

**Response Time:** dispatch, preflight, launch, and in-flight response time to a scene.

IV. **Policy:** In the event of more than one air ambulance provider being permitted within San Diego County, all EMS air ambulance service providers operating within San Diego County shall be dispatched by a center designated by the County of San Diego, Emergency Medical Services Branch (County EMS). The County shall enter into an agreement with the air ambulance dispatch agency in order to formalize the designation and ensure compliance with the requirements of this policy. The designated air ambulance dispatch agency shall enter into agreements with all EMS air ambulance service providers for air ambulance dispatch services and include a fee for dispatch services in order to offset operational costs.

- A. To be designated as an air ambulance dispatch center, the dispatch agency shall:
1. Be staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
  2. Possess radio capabilities allowing for constant communication with aircraft.
  3. Maintain a toll free dedicated telephone line to allow access by all requesting agencies.

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4. Provide, upon request, electronic copies of documentation needed for Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement (QA/QI) purposes, within thirty (30) days of incident.
5. Possess communication capabilities with all receiving hospitals.
6. Maintain a flight log to include, at a minimum:
  - a. time of request
  - b. requesting agency
  - c. location of incident
  - d. time dispatched
  - e. crew on board
  - f. time of lift off
  - g. time arrived on scene
  - h. time of lift off from scene
  - i. time arrived at receiving hospital
  - j. reason for aborted flight
7. Comply with EMS in the QA/QI process.
8. Maintain communication capabilities with all hospitals, all public safety agencies, BLS and ALS ground units, and air ambulance units.
9. Provide documentation of compliance with applicable Federal and State Air Regulations.

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- B. EMS may revoke or suspend authorization of an EMS aircraft designated dispatch center for failure to comply with applicable policies, procedures, protocols and regulations.

**V. Responsibilities of Dispatch Agency:**

The designated air ambulance dispatch agency provides the following services:

- A. Establishes the identity of the caller, confirms the location of the incident, the contact person's name, ground contact, radio frequency and other pertinent information.
- B. Determines the closest most appropriate available air ambulance.
- C. Informs the requesting agency of the ETA of the air ambulance.
- D. Requests launch or standby as appropriate from the closest most appropriate provider
- E. Maintains a system status plan approved by County EMS and adheres to the dispatch procedures established.
- F. Provides County EMS and participating air ambulance providers with system reports for each month.
- G. These system reports shall illustrate the dispatch times, response times and other patient service times captured by the air ambulance dispatch center.

**VI. Dispatch Procedure:**

- A. Air ambulance services request:
  - 1. Requesting agencies contact the air ambulance dispatch center on the designated phone line to request an air ambulance launch or standby providing

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- incident address or GPS coordinates and nature of incident, landing zone, ground contact unit, and coordination radio frequency.
2. The air ambulance dispatch center selects the closest most appropriate unit and advises the requesting agency of the air ambulance agency, unit number, response location and pertinent hospital receiving information.
  3. If the air ambulance originally dispatched to an incident is unavailable, the next most appropriate permitted, San Diego County based Primary Response Air Ambulance regardless of agency will be dispatched.
  4. The designated dispatch center shall use discretion when dispatching the closest most appropriate Primary Response Air Ambulance when aircraft are already airborne.
  5. In the event that air ambulance provider is contacted directly for a pre-hospital EMS response, the call information shall be transferred to the designated dispatch center to ensure that the closest most appropriate Primary Response Air Ambulance is dispatched to the incident.
  6. The air ambulance dispatch center provides information to the selected air ambulance provider and obtains an ETA.
  7. The air ambulance dispatch center tracks helicopter status as (ALERTED) when a standby is requested and (RESPONDING) when a launch is initiated.
  8. The air ambulance dispatch center tracks disposition of the response as (CANCELLED) or (TRANSPORT) as advised by the air ambulance provider at the close of each response.

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B. Air ambulance unit selection for responses:

1. The air ambulance provider contacts the air ambulance dispatch center with each "on and off duty" status of helicopter units, providing unit numbers, hours and location.
2. The air ambulance provider contacts the designated air ambulance dispatch provider with units "out of service" status or post-to-post moves within the County for various reasons including fueling, maintenance, special events, etc.
3. The air ambulance dispatch center selects the closest most appropriate air ambulance. When more than one air ambulance is based within the same designated dispatch map grid, the aircraft are considered co-located and will be dispatched as first unit up on a monthly rotational basis using odd and even months.

C. Other communications:

1. Pre-launch communication "requests for service" will be made to the air ambulance dispatch center, which then turns the request over to the dispatch center of the selected provider.
2. Post-launch communications pertaining to a response in progress should be made directly between the responding air ambulance agency and the requesting agency.

D. Posting locations:

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1. Air ambulance provider will contact the air ambulance dispatch center with each "on and off duty" status of helicopter units, providing unit numbers, hours and location.
  2. "Move up" locations may also be used at the discretion of the provider, if appropriate rest area and toilet facilities are provided for flight crews.
  3. Air ambulance providers shall notify Emergency Medical Services in writing ninety (90) days prior to moving or adding a base to allow for inspection of crew quarters and to ensure that the base location has been built into the dispatch system.
- E. Disputes:
1. Selection made by the air ambulance dispatch center at the time of service shall be final.
  2. Air ambulance providers who believe that a dispatch error has occurred shall present their complaints in writing to the EMS Ambulance Permit Officer or designee, within two weeks of the incident.
  3. The Ambulance Permit Officer or designee shall investigate disputed calls within two weeks of receipt and may at his/her discretion compensate an appealing air ambulance provider agency with an "extra turn or turns" in rotation. No other compensation shall be made and the decision of the Permit Officer is final.

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