

Chapter: COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES
Key Words: Policy/Procedure/Protocol

SUBJECT: Air Ambulance Dispatch Center
Designation/Dispatch of Air
Ambulance

POLICY NO: A-876
PAGE: 1 of 7
DATE: July 1, 2017

AUTHORITY: Health and Safety Code, Division 2.5, Sections 1797.204, 1797.206, 1797.218,
and 1798; and California Code of Regulations, Title 22, Division 9, Chapter 8.

I. PURPOSE

To provide for the coordination of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) aircraft response within San Diego County

II. BACKGROUND

A. 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, two attendants certified or licensed in Advanced Life Support (ALS), one of whom is a Registered Nurse (RN).

Closest, Most Appropriate:

A County of San Diego permitted Primary Response Air Ambulance based within the borders of San Diego County utilizing Aircraft Flight Following (AFF) Global Positioning System (GPS) data or last known verifiable location. The air ambulance with the shortest response time based on Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) query/calculations is considered the closest, most appropriate resource.

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Designated Dispatch Center: An agency that 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.

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

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

Mission Assignment: The process by the Designated Dispatch Center to pre-alert an air ambulance crew of a pending mission assignment while simultaneously placing a request to dispatch the designated aircraft through the air ambulance agency.

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

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

Response Time: Dispatch, pre-flight, launch, and in-flight response time to a scene.

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III. 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 (CoSD 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. Additionally, the County shall enter into agreements with the private air ambulance providers to secure access to agency AFF data and recover the costs associated with the dispatching air ambulances to EMS incidents.

- 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 and maintain an operable CAD with the ability to consume and utilize aircraft AFF data with the ability to de-conflict air space using technology.
 4. Provide, upon request, electronic copies of documentation needed for Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement (QA/QI) purposes within 30 days of incident. This may be in the form of CAD reports or other means of CAD data aggregation.
 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 of mission assignment
 - e. Time of lift off/responding
 - f. Time arrived on scene
 - g. Time of lift off from scene to receiving hospital
 - h. Time arrived at receiving hospital
 - i. Reason for aborted flight

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7. Comply with CoSD EMS in the QA/QI process.
8. Maintain communication capabilities with all hospitals, all public safety agencies, Basic Life Support (BLS) and ALS ground units, and air ambulance units.
9. Provide documentation of compliance with applicable federal and state air regulations.

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

IV. 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 by use of AFF information or last known location as determined by CAD.
- C.** Informs the requesting agency of the ETA of the air ambulance based on CAD.
- D.** The mission is assigned to a specific aircraft utilizing the CAD employed by the designated dispatch center to the aircraft identified as the closest, most appropriate resource.
- 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 which may include reports from third party data aggregation vendors.

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- G.** These system reports shall illustrate the dispatch times, response times, and other patient service times captured by the air ambulance dispatch center.

V. DISPATCH PROCEDURE

A. Air ambulance services request:

1. Requesting agencies contact the air ambulance dispatch center on the designated intercom, radio frequency, or phone line to request an air ambulance launch providing incident address or GPS coordinates and nature of incident, landing zone, ground contact unit, and coordination radio frequency.
2. Dispatch centers participating in the Regional CAD Interoperability Project (RCIP) may make a request for response via CAD to CAD request. CAD to CAD request must include incident address or GPS coordinates, nature of incident, landing zone, ground contact unit, and coordination radio frequency.
3. The air ambulance dispatch center selects the closest, most appropriate unit. The dispatch center will then pre-alert the selected aircraft of a "mission request/assignment" providing all pertinent incident information and then advises the requesting agency of the air ambulance agency, unit number, and response location.
4. 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.
5. The designated dispatch center shall use discretion when dispatching the closest, most appropriate Primary Response Air Ambulance when aircraft are already airborne, including notification of other known aircraft or militarized training routes in the incident location area.
6. In the event that air ambulance provider is contacted directly for a prehospital EMS response, the call information must be transferred to the designated dispatch center to ensure that the closest, most appropriate Primary Response Air Ambulance is dispatched to the incident.

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7. The air ambulance dispatch center provides information to the selected air ambulance provider requests response of the closest resource based on CAD utilizing specific agency aircraft identification numbers.
8. The air ambulance dispatch center tracks helicopter status as dispatched when the air ambulance is given a mission assignment and responding at the time of liftoff.
9. 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.

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. CAD will be updated to reflect this status.
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 at the same airport or geographical address, 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:

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.

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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 CoSD EMS in writing 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 CoSD EMS Ambulance Permit Officer, or designee, within two weeks of the incident.
3. The CoSD EMS 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 CoSD EMS Ambulance Permit Officer is final.