

Leadplane Training Lesson Plan

Verbal Skills

02-04-N9065-HO

Objective:

To familiarize the student with the importance of verbal skills (Phase 1).

To develop the student's proficiency with verbal skills (Phase 2).

To develop the student's mastery of verbal skills in a fire environment (Phase 3).

Content:

Communications is one of the most difficult aspects of a leadplane pilot's job. Studies show that 70 to 90% of communication is non-verbal. A large part of a leadplane pilot's job is communicating over the radio without the aid of visuals. This creates a distinct disadvantage for having good communications. Because of these limitations, communications need to be concise and clear. Added words, words with unclear meaning and small talk all tie up the frequency and can lead to confusion as well as an unsafe and ineffective environment.

Leadplane pilots set the tone for the mission. Their inflection, tone, cadence, and timing can have a large influence on the smoothness and success of the mission. A sense of urgency and emergency can easily be inserted into a mission, when there is no need to rush.

Although most of the leadplane communications are dynamic, there are times where the communications have a consistent set of information. It is important to take advantage of these situations to minimize communications over the radio. This will allow the pilot to focus on flying the aircraft. These communications are listed in the NWCG Standards for Aerial Supervision as scripts.

Leadplanes do have an advantage over other aerial supervision aircraft over the fire. The leadplane is authorized to go below 500 feet AGL. Having this option, along with smoke, eliminates some of the non-verbal limitations. There is a need to have strong verbal communication skills and relying on smoke or low level show me runs is not always practical.

Use good radio etiquette:

- Think before transmitting to aid in concise transitions.
- Use standard terminology.
- Identify the radio to be used and make sure it is selected on the audio panel.
- Keep transmissions short so that the receiver has a chance to confirm receipt of info and/or ask questions.

Communication is one factor that can distract the pilot from flying the aircraft. Prioritize flying the aircraft over communications. Abbreviating some of the information in communications will allow the pilot to manage the communications workload while focusing on flying the aircraft. If a tanker calls in at 12 miles during a live run the leadplane pilot can temporarily abbreviate the initial briefing to the altimeter setting and altitude. This way the leadplane pilot can focus on flying the profile and the inbound tanker can continue to the fire. At times a transmission to “stand by” will allow the leadplane pilot to focus on flying but will still inform the inbound aircraft that their initial call was heard.

If the air to air gets congested during a run, use the term “stand by, live run” or “clear the frequency, live run.” Guard frequency can be used to communicate the same message. If communications cannot be made, continue to fly the pattern and exit that was briefed. The tanker pilot is listening to the same radio traffic and will be aware of what is going on.

While in Phase 1 of training there will be a transition in the learning process where communications will improve. A basic understanding and use of the briefing scripts will be expected. A basic understanding and use of target descriptions will also be expected. The student should show a continued improvement in the use of briefing scripts and target descriptions throughout the phase 1 training. It is not expected that the standard scripts or target descriptions be perfect to complete Phase 1.

While in Phase 2, the student will be expected to have the scripts well-rehearsed and be able to modify them in order to fit the situation. During Phase 2 the student will continue to build experience with briefing scripts, target descriptions and more dynamic communications while flying the airplane.

When identifying hazards or points of interest, describe them in relation to the tanker. “The tower will be to your left on downwind” and not “We will be right of the tower.”

Completion Standards:

The lesson is complete when the student can successfully communicate intentions with the ground and aerial resources in a training environment for Phase 1 and in a fire environment for Phase 2.

The lesson is complete when the student can demonstrate mastery of verbal skills in a fire environment for Phase 3. Safety will never be in question and the briefing will be accomplished without the reliance on the evaluator.