



**National Wildfire  
Coordinating Group**  
National Interagency Fire Center  
3833 S. Development Avenue  
Boise, Idaho 83705

**National Coordination System Committee  
NCSC**

**NCSC MEMORANDUM # 22-05**

**To: Paul Linse, Deputy Director of Aviation and Operations, USDA Forest Service**

**From: Sean Peterson and Kathy Pipkin, co-chairs of the National  
Coordination System Committee (NCSC)**

**John Buehler, Chair of the National Interagency Aviation  
Committee (NIAC)**

**Date: June 15, 2022**

**Re: USFS Aircraft Dispatcher Compliance Timeline**

**Background:**

An interim Forest Service policy allowing fully qualified Initial Attack Dispatchers to dispatch Forest Service agency and contracted resources in the absence of or under the direct supervision of a fully qualified Aircraft Dispatcher expired on January 1, 2022. Upon expiration full compliance is mandated of the following Forest Service aircraft dispatch policy identified in Forest Service Handbook 5709.16, Chapter 32.22 which states:

"All aircraft (except sUAS; refer to FSH 5709.16 36.62 for additional requirements for sUAS operations) shall be dispatched by a qualified aircraft/aviation dispatcher or under the direct supervision of a qualified aircraft/aviation dispatcher. Aircraft dispatchers shall meet the training, currency, and qualification requirements defined in the Forest Service Fire and Aviation Qualifications Guide and the PMS 310-1 and complete the aircraft/aviation dispatcher courses in Interagency Aviation Training."

It is widely apparent that in most tier three local dispatch centers that the dispatch community is unable to comply with this policy. The following are identified challenges, recommendations, and a path forward for the dispatch community to come into compliance with Forest Service aviation policy.

**Challenges:**

The federal land management agencies are in a crisis to announce and fill dispatch positions in a timely manner. When they do so it is common to have no applicants that meet the minimum

qualifications. Local dispatch positions, including those with aircraft dispatching responsibilities are often seasonal, non-permanent positions, with a very high rate of fatigue and exhaustion which in turn creates a high turnover rate. This is seen nationally across all agencies. Tier three local dispatch centers across the nation are not being supported with funding for additional positions on their organization charts to mitigate the high rate of fatigue and exhaustion.

For several reasons, regular agency employees are routinely not available or are unwilling to take aircraft dispatch assignments or aircraft dispatcher trainee assignments, especially in centers with a high complexity level of aircraft dispatching. As a result, the position of Aircraft Dispatcher has one of the highest rates of “Unable to Fill” in the Interagency Resource Ordering Capability (IROC) nationally every year.

During the pandemic, the dispatch community was not able to meet the requirements of the proposed aircraft dispatcher policy. As we look to the future, all agencies must do a better job of prioritizing their workforce to recruit, develop and maintain Aircraft Dispatchers. If the dispatch community is not backed by all federal land management agencies they represent, then meeting the Forest Service policy on Aircraft Dispatcher requirements will continue to be a challenge.

The Dispatch Position and Curriculum subcommittee recently realigned the qualification standard that an individual must be fully qualified as an Initial Attack Dispatcher prior to becoming a fully qualified Aircraft Dispatcher. This has increased the quality of an Aircraft Dispatcher but has increased the time that it takes a new dispatcher to become a qualified Aircraft Dispatcher.

Not all Interagency Aviation Training (IAT) 200 and 300 level courses required to become a fully qualified aircraft dispatcher are being offered at the rate needed to effectively increase the capacity of aircraft dispatchers. There is a significant wait list nationally, for IAT Courses that are only offered bi-annually online with a cap of 60-65 students per course delivery including, A-208 Aircraft and Pilot Approval, A-303 Human Factors in Aviation, A-305 Risk Management II, A-307 Aviation Policy and Regulations.

### **Recommendation:**

To fulfill the intent of Forest Service Handbook 5709.16, Chapter 32.22, the following are recommendations from the National Coordination Systems Committee (NCSC) and the National Interagency Aviation Committee (NIAC). IAT courses, A-208 Aircraft and Pilot Approval, A-303 Human Factors in Aviation, A-305 Risk Management II, A-307 Aviation Policy and Regulations will be provided at an accelerated rate than are currently being delivered and Aircraft Dispatcher trainees will be prioritized over other employees seeking these classes for other qualifications.

Tier three Dispatch Center Managers will work with employees on annually updating and reviewing the employees Individual Development Plan. Tier three Center Managers should encourage employees to attain and retain the aircraft dispatcher qualification as a priority for the agency. The dispatch community will work with their Geographic Area Training

Representative (GATR) to ensure that prioritized aircraft dispatcher trainees are supplied with adequate trainee assignments to sign off on the ACDP position task book at an accelerated rate.

If all the above recommendations are met, the two committees believe that implementation of the existing policy could take effect as early as January 1, 2025. The chair of the NCSC will report bi-annually to NIAC on the progress regarding compliancy of the policy and clearly identify any challenges the national dispatch and coordination system is having regarding the timeline.

During this provisional period, NCSC and NIAC recommend that the interim policy from January 1, 2020, to January 1, 2022, be reinstated allowing that in the absence of a fully qualified aircraft dispatcher or under the direct supervision of aircraft dispatcher that a fully qualified initial attack dispatcher be allowed to dispatch Forest Service regular and contracted aviation resources. We also recommend as an interim policy that in the absence of a fully qualified dispatcher an order for an Aircraft Dispatcher be placed in IROC and the Unit or Forest Aviation Officer must be available to the dispatch center as needed.