



NATIONAL WILDFIRE COORDINATING GROUP

National Coordination System Committee (NCSC) Memorandum 23-08

December 13, 2023

TO: Anthony Lascano, Chair, National Interagency Aviation Committee
FROM: Sean Peterson, Chair, National Coordination System Committee
SUBJECT: Bi-Annual Update on Aircraft Dispatcher Qualifications

The National Coordination System Committee (NCSC) agreed to provide a bi-annual report to the National Interagency Aviation Committee (NIAC) on the progress regarding the future compliance of policy identified in Forest Service Handbook 5709.16, Chapter 32.22 as addressed in NCSC Memorandum, 2022-05 USFS Aircraft Dispatcher Compliance Timeline. Currently, modest progress has been made within the dispatch and coordination system. Multiple challenges continue to impact the communities' ability to address the lack of qualified aircraft dispatchers nationally. Recommendations made in the NCSC Memorandum 2022-05 have not been adequately addressed by the agencies to meet the needs of Forest Service policy requirements for implementation in 2024.

Commonly, positions with aircraft dispatching responsibilities continue to be advertised as seasonal or career seasonal non-permanent positions. NCSC Memorandum 22-05 recommended that:

All tier three local dispatchers will at minimum, have on their organization chart two permanent full time dedicated GS-9 aircraft dispatchers. High complexity dispatch centers with a heavy aviation presence may require a third dedicated GS-9 aircraft dispatcher to stay in full compliance with agency policy. Forests will be budgeted with additional non-discretionary funding to fill these positions as a priority for the agency. When advertising for aircraft dispatcher positions at the local level, additional funding must be budgeted for significant hiring bonuses into locations that are difficult to fill.

To become compliant by, or prior to, January 2024, organizational charts in tier three dispatch centers must be prioritized and expedited to include permanent year-round employment for aircraft dispatchers. This has yet to be accomplished.

Availability of training courses to achieve the aircraft dispatcher qualification continue to be a challenge, however this is an area where progress is being made by the dispatch community. Currently the NWCG 310-1 mandates ten Interagency Aviation Training (IAT) courses to become a fully qualified aircraft dispatcher. These courses make up a mix of online and in-person course work totaling 26.5 hours of curriculum. Historically, the dispatch community has not been prioritized for these courses as they compete with others in the interagency aviation community. To mitigate this shortfall, the NCSC has worked closely with the Office of Aviation Services (OAS) and added multiple IAT courses at the Consolidated Dispatch Applications Training (CDAT) this past spring and will also do so in the fall of

NWCG standards are interagency by design; however, the decision to adopt and utilize them is made independently by the individual member agencies and communicated through their respective directives systems.

2024 to address a back log of students for A-305, A-303 and A-307. Additionally, geographic areas are adding these training sessions to their annual workshops if they have the cadre available.

Unfortunately, there has been little progress in adding fully qualified aircraft dispatchers to the overall availability pool. As of February of 2023, there were 584 fully qualified and 230 trainee federal land management personnel with the aircraft dispatcher qualification. As of December of 2023, that number increased slightly to 590 fully qualified and 263 trainee federal land management personnel with the aircraft dispatcher qualification in IROC. Of those 590 fully qualified 113 individuals are Administratively Determined (AD) employees and 30 are temporary 1039 employees.

At the National Coordinators 2023 annual meeting in Phoenix, there was serious concern brought up by the dispatch community that the interagency community still does not have the staffing to comply with any additional changes pertaining to Forest Service Handbook 5709 regarding aircraft dispatching. NCSC is recommending that the following language remain in place for 2024 in Forest Service Handbook 5709.16 Chapter 32.22:

All aircraft (except sUAS; refer to 36.62 for additional requirements for sUAS operations) should be dispatched by a qualified aircraft/aviation dispatcher or under the direct supervision of a qualified aircraft/aviation dispatcher. If a qualified aircraft/aviation dispatcher is not immediately available, a qualified initial attack dispatcher (IADP) may dispatch aircraft. Aircraft/aviation dispatchers must meet the training, currency, and qualification requirements in the Forest Service Fire and Aviation Qualifications Guide and the PMS 310-1 and complete the aircraft/aviation dispatcher courses in IAT.

NCSC will continue to keep NIAC comprised of the nationally qualified and trainee aircraft dispatcher situation bi-annually and will provide an update in Spring of 2024.

Respectfully,

SEAN

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Sean Peterson, Chair NCSC