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NWCG Incident Position Standards for Aircraft Base Radio Operator

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The *NWCG Incident Position Standards for Aircraft Base Radio Operator* establishes national interagency standards for operating as an Aircraft Base Radio Operator (ABRO) on wildland fires. These standards are meant to ensure safe, efficient, and effective operations in support of interagency goals and objectives and should serve as a guide to promote effective and consistent on-incident training. By definition, NWCG standards encompass guidelines, procedures, processes, best practices, specifications, techniques, and methods.

The Aircraft Base Radio Operator Position Page, <https://www.nwcg.gov/positions/aircraft-base-radio-operator>, in the NWCG position catalog, includes the Incident Position Description (IPD) and Position Qualification Requirements, as well as links to standards and references needed to perform the duties of an Aircraft Base Radio Operator.

Tasks that are identified by a (*) are those tasks included for evaluation in the Position Task Book (PTB). Tasks not identified for evaluation in the PTB still represent standards for successful performance in the position and should be included in a comprehensive training assignment.

Where references are identified by a (**), refer to your home unit, agency, or organization for specific guidance and policy documentation. For example:

***Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations (Red Book)*

The National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) provides national leadership to enable interoperable wildland fire operations among federal, state, Tribal, territorial, and local partners. NWCG operations standards are interagency by design; they are developed with the intent of universal adoption by the member agencies. However, the decision to adopt and utilize them is made independently by the individual member agencies and communicated through their respective directives systems.

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General References

- *NWCG Position Task Book for Aircraft Base Radio Operator (ABRO)*, PMS 311-87, <https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/position-taskbooks/aircraft-base-radio-operator>
- *NWCG Incident Response Pocket Guide (IRPG)*, PMS 461, <https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/pms461>
- *NWCG Aviation Mishap Response Guide and Checklist*, PMS 503, <https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/pms503>
- *NWCG Standards for Aviation Risk Management*, PMS 530, <https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/pms530>
- *NWCG Aviation Risk Management Workbook*, PMS 530-1, <https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/pms530-1>
- *NWCG Standards for Helicopter Operations (NSHO)*, PMS 510, <https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/pms510>
 - Helibase Organizational Chart (HBM-1)
 - Aviation Locations (HBM-2)
 - Helibase Flight Following Log (HBM-5)
 - Flight Hour Tracking (HBM-5A)
 - Helibase Mission Request Log (HBM-6)
 - Emergency Rescue Information (HBM-15)
- *A Preparedness Guide for Wildland Firefighters and Their Families*, PMS 600, <https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/pms600>
- *NWCG Standards for Interagency Incident Business Management*, PMS 902, <https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/pms902>
- Incident Command System (ICS) Forms, <https://www.nwcg.gov/ics-forms>
 - Incident Radio Communications Plan (ICS 205)
 - Medical Plan and Medical Incident Report (ICS 206 WF)
 - Incident Organization Chart (ICS 207)
 - General Message (ICS 213)
 - Activity Log (ICS 214)
 - Air Operations Summary (ICS 220)
 - Incident Personnel Performance Rating (ICS 225 WF)
- Standard (SF) and Optional (OF) Forms, <https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/pms902>
 - Crew Time Report (CTR), SF 261
 - Incident Time Report, OF 288
- Incident Action Plan (IAP)

Agency-Specific References

- ***Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations (Red Book)*, <https://www.nifc.gov/standards/guides/red-book>
- ***National Incident Radio Support Cache (NIRSC) User's Guide*, https://www.nifc.gov/sites/default/files/NIICD/docs/2024_NIRSC_User_Guide_Webview.pdf

- ***NIRSC Radio Program Guides,*
<https://www.nifc.gov/sites/default/files/NIICD/docs/2022%20NIRSC%20Radio%20Program%20Guides.pdf>
- ***National Interagency Standards for Resource Mobilization,*
<https://www.nifc.gov/nicc/mobguide/index.html>

*Leadership Level 1, Follower (Provide Action)

Followers have several responsibilities: to become competent in basic job skills, take initiative, learn from others, ask questions, and develop communication skills. For additional information, review the Level 1 description, expected behaviors and knowledge, suggested development goals, and self-study opportunities <https://www.nwcg.gov/committees/leadership-committee/leadership-levels>.

Description

- Leadership development starts the first day of the job.
- Followers function as a team member.
- Part of being a leader is exercising good followership and understanding human dynamics.
- Followership begins the journey of becoming a student of fire.

Behaviors

- Performs entry-level incident management tasks, contributing to team mission accomplishment and performance.
- Takes responsibility for personal actions and decisions, demonstrating the core value of integrity.
- Takes initiative to ensure the mission is accomplished and team performance is improved.
- Practices the five communication responsibilities to develop skill and ensure individual contribution to risk management.
- Interacts with team members, in a positive and constructive manner, to build team cohesion.
- Acts with humility and learns from others to improve technical and leadership skills.
- Asks questions to increase individual knowledge and improve the safety of self and team members.

Knowledge

- Knowledge of the wildland fire leadership values, principles, and traits to inform expectations of their behaviors as a team member.
- Knowledge of leadership concepts including courage, compassion, authenticity, humility, and empathy to inform expectations of their behavior as a team member.
- Knowledge of the risk management process to understand their role in accident prevention and decision-making.
- Knowledge of the decision-making process to inform their role in an effective decision process.
- Knowledge of the impacts of cumulative and traumatic stress to assist in ensuring resilience and mental and emotional health.
- Knowledge of the elements of human factors and barriers to situational awareness to understand how human elements can contribute to team performance and fireline safety.
- Knowledge of the value diversity of thought and perspective bring to team performance to ensure respectful interactions with team members and to contribute to a positive team culture/command climate.

Prepare and Mobilize

Ensure individual readiness.

When to start task: Prior to assignment.

Resources to complete task: *NWCG Position Task Book for Aircraft Base Radio Operator (ABRO)*, PMS 311-87; ***National Interagency Standards for Resource Mobilization* or agency guide; *NSHO; A Preparedness Guide for Wildland Firefighters and Their Families*, PMS 600; *NWCG Standards for Interagency Incident Business Management*, PMS 902; *IRPG*; Incident Qualifications Card (Red Card); ***NIRSC User's Guide*.

How to accomplish task:

- Build a kit.
 - Kit Contents
 - Incident Qualifications Card (Red Card)
 - *IRPG*
 - *NWCG Position Task Book for Aircraft Base Radio Operator (ABRO)*, PMS 311-87
 - Active Automated Flight Following (AFF) account and password (not required but extremely beneficial/highly recommended)
 - Office supplies (pens, pencils, and highlighters)
 - Documentation Forms
 - *NSHO* forms (Appendix B-Helibase Management Forms and Checklists)
 - ❖ HBM-5 Flight Following Log
 - ❖ HBM-5A Flight Hours Log
 - ❖ HBM-6 Mission Request Log
 - Incident Personnel Performance Rating (ICS 225 WF)
 - Crew Time Report (CTR), SF 261 and/or Incident Time Report, OF 288
 - Travel log
 - Casual Hire (Administratively Determined [AD]/Emergency Firefighter ([EFF]) Forms, as applicable
 - Agency-specific forms (e.g., Injury and Workers' Compensation)
 - Accident forms
 - Suggested Items:
 - Cell phone with chargers
 - Phone list
 - Credit card with a sufficient credit limit
 - Pocket calendar
 - Pocket notepad
 - Calculator
 - Headlamp/flashlight with extra batteries
 - Watch
- Contact dispatch and verify your data/status is current in the Interagency Resource Ordering Capability (IROC).
- Pack red bag for 14-21 days.
- Prepare to be absent from home/family.

Gather critical information pertinent to the assignment.

When to start task: Upon receipt of resource order.

Resources to complete task: Resource order, phone, internet connection, fax, and radio.

How to accomplish task:

- Acquire resource order.
 - Contents:
 - Incident/project name
 - Incident/project order number
 - Financial codes
 - Descriptive location
 - Legal location (township, range, section)
 - Incident radio frequency (if available)
 - Incident base/phone number
 - Request number
 - Reporting date/time and location
 - Special instructions (authorized equipment such as laptop, cell phone, etc.)
 - Ensure the manifest has correct spelling, home unit, phone numbers, and all other information.
- Coordinate with dispatch to fulfill resource order.
 - Mode of travel
 - Estimated Time of Departure (ETD)
 - Destination – Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA) and place
 - Location for rest overnight (RON) if unable to make end destination within that operational shift
- Gather situational awareness.
 - Review the IAP, if available.
 - Collect maps and frequencies if available.
 - Get directions to the incident.
 - The resource order provides the address/reporting location.
 - Gather weather information.

Travel to and check in at assignment.

When to start task: Upon receipt of resource order.

Resources to complete task: *NWCG Standards for Interagency Incident Business Management*, PMS 902; check-in sheet and/or IAP; navigation method (e.g., GPS, maps); phone numbers and contacts at the incident; hiring paperwork if applicable; ***Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* (Red Book).

How to accomplish task:

- Follow agency-specific air and ground travel guidelines.
 - Air Travel Considerations
 - Comply with weight limitations.
 - ❖ Baggage may exceed airline limitations and additional fees may apply.
 - Check bags for hazardous materials.
 - Ground Travel Considerations

- Follow time limitations/driver duty day limitations.
- Consider logistical needs such as restrooms, restaurants, etc.
- Ensure your rental, National Emergency Rental Vehicle (NERV), or personal vehicle is on the resource order, if applicable.
- Reference General Services Administration (GSA) for per diem and lodging rates.
 - ❖ Check with the Helibase Manager (HEBM)/Fire Management Officer (FMO)/Fire Business Office to learn how to provide justification when the rate exceeds per diem allowances.
- Model professionalism and a professional attitude.
 - Wear attire that reflects positively on the agency you represent.
 - Consider normal daily working uniform.
- Ensure check-in procedures are complete.
 - Upon incident arrival, complete the check-in process as described in the IAP or provided by the Status/Check-In Recorder (SCKN) or person designated on the resource order.
 - Be prepared with the resource order, Incident Qualifications Card (Red Card), and agency-specific agreement sheet.
- If a trainer or trainee, check in with the Incident Training Specialist (TNSP), if available.

***Obtain briefing from previous shift/assignment position as necessary.**

When to start task: When check-in is complete and the HEBM has been located.

Resources to complete task: IAP; Air Operations Summary (ICS 220); Incident Radio Communications Plan (ICS 205); Medical Plan and Medical Incident Report (ICS 206 WF); *NWCG Aviation Mishap Response Guide*, PMS 503; *NSHO* forms.

How to accomplish task:

- Obtain briefing and work assignments from the HEBM.
 - Contact the base manager and ask pertinent questions.
 - What time is the base briefing?
 - How many aircraft are at the base?
 - What does the daily flight time look like?
 - Will there be support with meals, camping, etc.?
- Review the IAP and base operations plans.
 - Incident Radio Communications Plan (ICS 205)
 - Air Operations Summary (ICS 220)
 - Flight Hours Log (HBM-5A)
 - Medical Plan (ICS 206 WF)
 - *NWCG Aviation Mishap Response Guide*, PMS 503
 - Emergency Rescue Information (HBM-15)
 - Aviation Locations (HBM-2)
 - Helibase Mission Request Log (HBM-6)
- Familiarize yourself with the helicopters/aircraft on base.
 - Helibase Diagram (HBM-10)
 - Capabilities
 - Tail #/Call sign



Build the Team

Conduct self in a professional manner.

When to start task: Throughout the incident.

Resources to complete task: *IRPG*, agency-specific Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

How to accomplish task:

- Demonstrate professional behavior on and off-duty.
- Demonstrate respect for others.
 - Assume goodwill and best intentions.
- Be punctual.
- Maintain a state of readiness.
 - Ensure radios are functional.
 - Ensure supplies are sufficient.
 - Provide timely and accurate communication.
 - Remain focused and mentally prepared.
 - Perform regular mental self-check for readiness.
 - Recognize and communicate lack of mental and/or physical preparedness.
- Wear appropriate attire.
 - Refer to agency and regional attire requirements.
 - Do not wear attire with personal, political, or graphic statements or images.

Identify and participate in a common operating picture.

When to start task: Upon receipt of initial helibase operational briefing and daily updates.

Resources to complete task: IAP and briefing from the HEBM.

How to accomplish task:

- Establish and maintain positive interpersonal working relationships.
 - Learn names and exchange contact information.
 - Promote community through team activities.
- Build personal awareness of the common operating picture.
 - Obtain daily or more frequent briefings from the HEBM.
 - Confirm roles and responsibilities.
 - Promote leader's intent.
 - Identify strengths of team members.
 - Recognize co-workers' past assignments and experience.
 - Discuss qualification training needs for team members.
- Develop relationships and collaborate with interagency partners.
 - Build awareness and respect for a variety of SOPs.

Apply Incident Command System (ICS) terminology, organization, and command structure.

When to start task: Throughout the incident.



Resources to complete task: Helibase Organizational Chart (HBM-1), IAP, Incident Organization Chart (ICS 207), and phone numbers.

How to accomplish task:

- Identify HEBM, peers, and subordinates.
- Distinguish between roles and capabilities of aviation resources and positions.
- Utilize correct ICS terminology when communicating.

Model leadership values and principles.

When to start task: Throughout the incident.

Resources to complete task: *IRPG*.

How to accomplish task:

- Refer to the Duty, Respect, and Integrity and the Communication Responsibilities sections in the *IRPG*.



Perform Aircraft Base Radio Operator-Specific Duties

***Provide aircraft advisories and mission information prior to aircraft takeoff/landing.**

When to start task: When aircraft is ready to lift for takeoff or is inbound back to the helibase for landing.

Resources to complete task: Radios, *NSHO* forms, wind indicator, weather radar, helibase map with pad numbers, incident-specific maps, computer with AFF.

How to accomplish task:

- Prior to takeoff, provide pilot with wind direction and speed, hazards, other aircraft in the airspace, radio contact information, etc.
- Document personnel/passengers on board, hours of fuel, departure time, destination, and mission.
- Communicate specific mission, destination, ground contact, and hazards.
- Contact incident personnel to notify them of inbound aircraft.
- If the Helicopter Manager (HMGB) is not onboard the helicopter, advise them when aircraft is inbound to the helibase.
- Prior to landing, provide the pilot with wind direction and speed, hazards, and other aircraft in the airspace.
- Record ending Hobbs, number of drops made, pounds of cargo, and/or other data as requested.
- Calculate the remaining available flight time for the aircraft.

***Flight follow aircraft at the incident.**

When to start task: When the aircraft has departed for a mission.

Resources to complete task: *NSHO* forms, radios, computer with AFF, timers for aircraft.

How to accomplish task:

- Obtain information on wind direction and speed, hazards, other aircraft in the airspace, contact information, etc.
- Confirm positive or negative AFF. Request recycle as necessary or revert to 15-minute (or agency-specified interval) radio check-ins.
- Conduct 15-minute (or agency-specified interval) check-ins via AFF or radio.
- Document aircraft location/heading/time.
- Utilize:
 - Flight Following Log (HBM-5)
 - Flight Hours Log (HBM-5A)
 - Helibase Mission Request Log (HBM-6)

***Manage communication with various aircraft and incident positions using multiple radios and frequencies.**

When to start task: At the beginning of the operational shift, when aircraft are active at the incident, or as radio communications are received from other incident areas.



Resources to complete task: Radios and radio manuals, *NSHO* forms, incident-specific maps, IAP, and Activity Log (ICS 214).

How to accomplish task:

- Communicate accurate information clearly and concisely.
- Confirm frequencies and test functionality.
- Prioritize communications.
- Be proficient in setting and adjusting scan lists, priority channels, and hand programming or cloning mobile radios.
- Monitor multiple frequencies for pertinent information and document, as appropriate.
- Submit request for additional frequencies as needed to HEBM.

***Use appropriate *NWCG Standards for Helicopter Operations (NSHO)*, PMS 510 forms to document relevant flight and mission related information.**

When to start task: When the helibase becomes operational in the morning, when planning for missions, and throughout the assignment.

Resources to complete task: Radios, AFF account, *NSHO* forms, pens, pencils, printer, photocopier, computer.

How to accomplish task:

- Ensure required forms are available and updated with current information for the operational shift.
 - Ensure use of the appropriate form.
- Record information on the appropriate form as information is provided or request information as needed.
 - Confirm written documentation is clear and legible.
 - Ensure documentation is detailed and complete.
- Provide updates to the HEBM or HMGBs and helispot and dipsite managers as necessary.

***Plan for and respond to medical and aircraft emergencies as stated in the Incident Action Plan (IAP)/Helibase Mishap Response Plan.**

When to start task: When an incident within an incident (IWI) or an aircraft emergency occurs.

Resources to complete task: Radio; IAP; Incident Radio Communications Plan (ICS 205); Air Operations Summary (ICS 220); Medical Plan and Medical Incident Report (ICS 206 WF); Helibase Crash Rescue Plan; *NWCG Aviation Mishap Response Guide and Checklist*, PMS 503; *NSHO* forms.

How to accomplish task:

- Participate in personnel training ahead of time and often to prepare for real medical emergencies and to ensure all are current on procedures and protocols.
- Review the Helibase Crash Rescue Plan; Incident Medical Plan (ICS 206 WF); *NWCG Aviation Mishap Response Guide*, PMS 503; and/or local emergency response plan and complete a scenario-based exercise for overdue aircraft, missing aircraft, or other aviation mishaps.
- Prepare to support medical incidents based on procedures stated in the IAP, the Medical Plan, or other relevant guidelines.
- Manage the medical or aircraft emergency communications based on procedures stated in the Medical Incident Report, Helibase Crash Rescue Plan, and/or other relevant guidelines.



- Provide communications as needed to HEBM, Helicopter Coordinator (HLCO), Air Tactical Group Supervisor (ATGS), Incident Command Post (ICP), IWI Incident Commander (IC), and/or local dispatch via direct, radio, or phone communication.
- Document the incident, requests for resources, and locations and timeline while maintaining flight following with other aircraft.

Close out aircraft base at the end of the workday.

When to start task: At the end of the operational shift.

Resources to complete task: None.

How to accomplish task:

- Notify the ICP and/or dispatch that operations have concluded.
- Turn off phones, computers, and radios at the end of the workday.
- Ensure all documentation is complete, legible, and retained per the Incident Management Team (IMT) or local SOPs requirements.
- Collect aircraft daily cost summaries and compile helibase daily cost if requested.
- Close out all logs and prepare mission requests and flight use logs for the following day.
- Clean up the workstation.



Communicate and Coordinate

***Demonstrate strong verbal communication skills.**

When to start task: Throughout the assignment.

Resources to complete task: *IRPG, NSHO.*

How to accomplish task:

- Ensure clear dialogue and open communication among personnel.
- Use active listening skills.
- Confirm understanding of information provided and received.
- Effectively manage the exchange of information and communication flow.
- Ensure radio transmissions are disciplined and concise.

***Ensure proper use of radios.**

When to start task: Throughout the assignment.

Resources to complete task: Local communication plan, Air Operations Summary (ICS 220), Incident Radio Communications Plan (ICS 205), radio manufacturer user manual, ****NIRSC User's Guide, **NIRSC Radio Program Guides.**

How to accomplish task:

- Obtain and verify frequencies being utilized for the incident/project.
- Review the communications plan within the IAP/in-briefing packet and determine relevant frequencies; ask any needed questions to clarify which frequency is utilized for what function and/or location.
- Ensure helibase radios contain correct frequencies; clone or accurately hand program frequencies as needed.
- Perform radio checks.
- Ensure priority channels are set and radios are scanning appropriate frequencies.
- Use radios to communicate with your own and adjoining/assigned resources.
- Contact other IMT sections/divisions/helibase staff/helisports/aircraft using mobile or handheld radios on the appropriate radio and frequency using proper radio etiquette (i.e., identify the unit you are calling, followed by your own identifier).

***Communicate and coordinate with assigned aviation resources and other incident personnel.**

When to start task: Throughout the assignment.

Resources to complete task: Radios, IAP, phones, dispatch, *NSHO* forms, and current situational awareness.

How to accomplish task:

- Participate in morning briefings.
 - Provide communication updates, pending missions, and weather as directed by the HEBM.



- Update helibase boards (NFES-7083) and forms (*NSHO* Appendix B-HBM forms and checklists and Appendix D-Helibase Job Aid [HJA] forms) as required or requested by the HEBM.
- Maintain communication and mission updates throughout the day with field resources and/or aviation resources.
- Establish communications and exchange necessary information with the assigned Deck Coordinator (DECK), helispot manager, dipsite manager, and cargo manager.

***Participate in helibase operational briefings, debriefs, and/or After Action Reviews (AARs).**

When to start task: Upon completion of a significant event or at the end of the day.

Resources to complete task: AAR section of the *IRPG*, event documentation.

How to accomplish task:

- Be prepared to contribute information collected throughout the event from your perspective.
- Ensure clear dialogue and communication.
 - Engage in active listening.
 - Participate in open discussions.
 - Avoid interrupting.
- Apply lessons learned to future work.

Manage Risk

***Apply the Risk Management Process.**

When to start task: Throughout the assignment.

Resources to complete task: Risk Management Process in the *IRPG*; radio; *NSHO* HJA forms; *NWCG Standards for Aviation Risk Management*, PMS 530; and *NWCG Aviation Risk Management Workbook*, PMS 530-1.

How to accomplish task:

- Identify or recognize hazards/hazardous situations for aircraft en route to or over the fire as well as those assigned and/or located at the helibase.
- Communicate identified hazards to affected air crews, the HEBM, and other affected personnel.
- Deconflict aircraft takeoffs and landings at the helibase.
- Refer to the Risk Management Process in the *IRPG*.
- Refer to *Standards for Aviation Risk Management*, PMS 530 and *NWCG Aviation Risk Management Workbook*, PMS 530-1.

Ensure own and others' safety and welfare.

When to start task: Throughout the assignment.

Resources to complete task: *Standards for Aviation Risk Management*, PMS 530; *Aviation Risk Management Workbook*, PMS 530-1; Medical Plan and Medical Incident Report (ICS 206 WF); SAFECOM; SAFENET; General Message (ICS 213); and agency-specific forms.

How to accomplish task:

- Verify helibase and/or incident emergency and safety procedures.
- Report changes in assignment based on safety or probability of success.
- Report hazards, incidents, injuries, and accidents to the HEBM immediately.
- Inform the home unit supervisor of any relevant injuries or accidents.
- Provide information for the SAFECOM process as requested.

Document

Complete all administrative tasks and documentation in an accurate and timely manner.

When to start task: When directed to complete, as needed, and as outlined by agency policy.

Resources to complete task: Crew Time Report (CTR), SF 261; Incident Time Report, OF 288; Incident Personnel Performance Rating (ICS 225 WF); General Message (ICS 213); Activity Log (ICS 214); agency/mission-specific forms and other documents as assigned.

How to accomplish task:

- Complete CTRs, performance evaluations, travel, etc.
- Follow forms completion steps as outlined by agency policy, instructions provided with the form, and/or specific instructions as provided by the IMT or the HEBM for the incident.
- Retain all travel documentation and receipts per agency direction.
 - Air
 - Rental car
 - Lodging
 - Fuel

Demobilize

Prepare for and implement demobilization.

When to start task: Upon notification of demobilization at the end of the assignment.

Resources to complete task: IAP, local SOPs, and agency-specific SOPs.

How to accomplish task:

- Receive demobilization instructions from the HEBM, dispatch center, IAP, or other posted communications.
- Submit the incident-specific demobilization form to the Demobilization Unit or dispatch.
- Return equipment and supplies to the appropriate unit.
- Resupply/restock property consumed on an incident. (Resupply can occur from the supply unit at the incident, local cache, or from other sources at the home unit.)
- Check out with the TNSP, if applicable.
- Ensure agency-specific work/rest driving standards are followed.
- Depart from the incident.
 - Report status to home unit including reassignment or ETA to home unit.
 - Check in with dispatch, Duty Officer, or appropriate supervisor.

The *NWCG Incident Position Standards for Aircraft Base Radio Operator* is developed and maintained by the Interagency Helicopter Operations Subcommittee (IHOPS), under the direction of the National Interagency Aviation Committee (NIAC), an entity of the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG).

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