EMS AIR RESOURCE UTILIZATION

Effective: May 5, 2008
Replaces: January 22, 2007
Review: November, 2011

Resources: None

I. Purpose

To establish procedures for appropriate use of air resources in the Santa Clara County EMS System.

II. Authorization

A. Aircraft providing prehospital patient transport within Santa Clara County must be authorized, classified, and permitted as an Air Ambulance or Rescue Aircraft by the Agency. Authorization must be confirmed by written agreement between the County and the Provider.

B. Dispatches by County Communications shall be the only valid authorization for air resource operation at the scene of an emergency in Santa Clara County.

III. Medical Control

A. Treatment rendered in all prehospital care situations (including air transport) shall be in accordance with current Santa Clara County policies and procedures, and/or be approved in writing by the EMS Medical Director.

B. Each air resource provider shall have a Flight Medical Director.

C. In situations where a California licensed physician is a member of the flight crew, ground personnel shall utilize Policy 601 to determine the point at which responsibility for the patient transfers from ground to flight personnel.

IV. Request for Air Unit Utilization

The decision to use air unit transport involves both clinical and scene management considerations.

A. Air units are requested via County Communications anytime that it is determined that there is potential need for air transport by the incident
commander (IC). Immediate notification of, and coordination with, the IC is essential, once the decision has been made to utilize an air resource.

B. Responding units that wish to have an air resource dispatched shall have County Communications contact the IC prior to activation. In the event that the IC cannot be reached, the Contractor’s supervisor or the EMS Duty Chief may authorize the activation. In such cases, County Communications shall continue to attempt to notify the IC of addition of the resource.

C. The IC shall determine suitability of the scene or availability of nearby rendezvous site for air ambulance operations.

D. The IC shall cancel air resources as soon as it has been determined that air transport is not necessary.

V. Guidelines for Air Resource Use

A. Automatic Air Resource Response Areas

County Communications will dispatch an air resource to predetermined areas where ground ambulance arrival is greatly extended or impossible due to geographic conditions and if the call is classified through emergency medical dispatch (EMD) as a Charlie, Delta, or Echo response. Automatic response areas include:

1. Mt. Hamilton region/San Antonio Valley and all areas east of Grant Ranch.

2. All areas east of Anderson Reservoir.

An advanced life support (ALS) ground unit shall be dispatched simultaneously with the air ambulance. The first arriving medical crew (air or ground) to make patient contact may cancel the response of additional medical crews and assume care for the patient(s), when appropriate to do so.

B. Air Resource Consideration Areas

County Communications will advise the first responder fire service agency, in predetermined areas and where ground ambulance arrival may be extended and if the call is classified through EMD as a Charlie, Delta, or Echo response, that an air resource should be considered. However, the resource will not be dispatched until advised by the jurisdictional authority. Air Response Consideration Areas include:

1. Pacheco Pass Corridor, east of Casa De Fruta.
2. Hecker Pass Corridor, west of Watsonville Road.

Air Resource Transportation Considerations for Prehospital Providers

1. Major Trauma Victims (MTVs) meeting only Mechanism of Injury criteria should be transported by ground whenever possible. Only in unusual circumstances should air transportation be used.

2. Air transportation should be considered for MTVs who meet physiologic and/or anatomic criteria and where ground transport times are in excess of thirty (30) minutes and when the use of an air resource will not extend the total prehospital time.

Prehospital care providers must consider delays that are associated with the use of air resources when making transport decisions. This should include on-scene aircraft loading and rendezvous activities, and ensuring that the shortest, most appropriate transportation method is used. In most cases, ground ambulance transport is preferred.

C. Multiple Casualty Incidents (MCIs)

When air resources are utilized in the context of an MCI, the Transportation Group Supervisor shall assign air unit destination.

D. Miscellaneous

Based on the performance of the EMS System, the EMS Agency may authorize alternate criteria for the use of air ambulances and/or rescue aircraft.

VI. Dispatch

A. If ground ambulance personnel arrive on the scene of call after the arrival of the public safety IC, the crew shall request air resources through the IC. If the IC concurs with use, the ambulance crew may request the resources through County Communications.

B. Information to be given to County Communications when requesting an air unit includes:

1. Location and number of patient(s).
2. Landing Zone (LZ) location if identified; map coordinates, if known; significant landmarks identifiable from the air; and any known scene limitations (weather, etc.).

3. Unit identification of the Incident Commander and frequency to be utilized on scene if other than California On-Scene Emergency Coordination (CALCORD).

C. County Communications shall always dispatch the closest Santa Clara County-permitted air ambulance unless the use of a rescue aircraft is indicated.

D. In the event that no Santa Clara County-permitted air ambulances are available, the closest non-permitted air ambulance or ALS rescue aircraft shall be used. In such cases, the EMS Duty Chief shall be advised anytime mutual aid resources are requested.

E. County Communications shall notify responding medical personnel and the Incident Commander of the name of the responding aircraft and their estimated time of arrival (ETA) upon the completion of dispatch.

F. Each permitted air resource is responsible for reporting to and maintaining current availability status with County Communications through EMSSystems. In the event of EMSSystems failure, voice communication shall be made to County Communications.

G. Air resources shall notify the receiving facility of their impending arrival as soon as possible (prior to arrival); this notification is to include pertinent patient information and ETA.

H. County Communications will notify air resource dispatch centers if multiple air units are being used in the EMS System at the same time. This notification will include type of aircraft and unit call sign.

VII. Ground Personnel Responsibilities

A. Ground (medical) personnel are responsible for patient care until a transition of care occurs.

B. Ground medical personnel responding to the scene shall not be released until the flight crew has assumed responsibility for the patient or there is no patient, as determined by the senior medical officer on-scene, and the air ambulance has been canceled.

C. If there are patients transported by a ground unit as well as an air unit (and the air resource has not yet arrived), ground personnel will triage and prepare all patients for transport, load the patient(s) to be transported
by ground unit and may await the aircraft or triage the air transport patient into the care of the on-scene EMTs in accordance with policy. Under no circumstances are paramedic personnel to depart the scene prior to the arrival of the air ambulance until the Base Hospital has approved this transfer of care.

D. On-scene flight crew clinical care should be expedited so that the benefits of rapid air transport are not minimized by extended on-scene times by flight crews.

VIII. Safety

A. The pilot shall have final authority as to the safe operation of the air ambulance. If, in the pilot's judgment, patient transport by aircraft would be unsafe, the patient shall be transported by ground ambulance.

B. The air resource has the authority to "self-cancel" if, in the pilot's opinion, the scene or flight conditions are not safe.

C. Scene security is of prime importance. The IC shall insure the landing/rendezvous site is secure.

D. Ground personnel shall not approach an air resource unless directed to do so by flight personnel. When approaching or departing the aircraft, ground personnel shall not lift anything higher than their heads, nor shall they at any time approach or depart an air ambulance from the rear or from the uphill side when the aircraft is located on a slope.

E. All prehospital care personnel shall wear protective gear as provided in Policy 613 when working with aircraft at the scene of a call.

F. All air resources shall communicate on designated air-to-air frequencies, as appropriate (congested LZs, multiple aircraft response, etc.).

G. LZs shall be established at seventy-five by seventy-five (75 x 75) feet during daytime hours and one hundred twenty-five by one hundred twenty-five (125 x 125) feet during hours of darkness.

IX. Patient Destination and Hospital Notification

A. Air resource destination is determined by Santa Clara County Prehospital Care Policy, not flight crew discretion, unless a safety hazard exists.

B. In an MCI, the Transportation Group Supervisor or scene paramedic shall provide a destination to the air unit.
C. In cases of MCI, the air unit shall transport to the farthest appropriate facility as permitted by policy or as assigned by the Transportation Group Supervisor or Incident Commander.

D. In the event that a non-permitted air resource (mutual aid air ambulance or rescue aircraft) is used, the ground paramedic crew shall notify the receiving hospital of the impending arrival of the patient.

X. Documentation

A. Patients transported by an air resource from emergency medical scenes within Santa Clara County shall have a Santa Clara County Prehospital Care Report (PCR) completed by the attending flight crew, and distributed in accordance with Prehospital Care Policy.

XI. Miscellaneous

A. A law enforcement agency responding to the scene of a medical emergency in a rescue aircraft may initiate response of an air ambulance upon establishing a medical need, in accordance with these guidelines.

B. Rescue aircraft may be requested for the following:

1. When specialty services such as hoist, skid, basket operations are necessary to rescue a patient.

2. Permitted air resources shall be always be used as the primary means for patient transport in Santa Clara County. If a rescue aircraft advises County Communications of their availability and has a shorter ETA than the dispatched air ambulance, the rescue aircraft may provide transport.

3. The California Highway Patrol (CHP) maintains the authority for numerous freeway and roadway systems in California. As such, a CHP helicopter may be utilized for rescue services or patient transport services when requested by the IC.

4. When used for patient transport, rescue aircraft shall adhere to Santa Clara County Prehospital Care Policy.

E. The Santa Clara County Sheriff’s Office helicopter may be utilized to assist in EMS Operations as requested by the IC or EMS Duty Chief.

Examples include locating patients in remote environments, transporting a paramedic to the scene of a remote response, providing scene surveillance, transporting the EMS Duty Chief to the scene of an incident when necessary, etc.
The Sheriff’s helicopter is not designed to transport patients or conduct technical rescue operations.