



AMERICAN *HELICOPTER SERVICES &* AERIAL *FIREFIGHTING ASSOCIATION*

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For Immediate Release:

Air Tanker And Helicopter Operators Working To Stem Massive Arizona Wildfire

Washington, D.C., June 10, 2011...Privately operated aerial firefighting companies are putting additional fixed wing tankers and helicopters on the massive Wallow fire in eastern Arizona, as the blaze remains uncontained. The fire, which has the potential to become the largest in Arizona's history, has to date engulfed over 389,000 acres, about 620 square miles.

"This fire is spotting well ahead of itself because the high winds are carrying the embers beyond the main fire," said Rick Livingston, President of Intermountain Helicopter, Inc., in Sonora, California. The company, he reported, has just positioned a Bell 212 medium helicopter at Show Low, from which it is averaging 20-25 water drops from a 240-gallon capacity external bucket, and averaging 4-5 flight hours daily, "Right now, the real focus of our efforts is to save structures. There is really no end in sight for this fire right now."

Also operating out of Show Low is Columbia Helicopters' heavy, twin-rotor Chinook 234, according to the Portland, Oregon-based company's Public Relations Manager Dan Sweet. Supported by a crew of three pilots, and a 12-member ground crew, the helicopter has been on firefighting duty since June 6, with an initial deployment to Springerville, Arizona. The Chinook uses a 2,650 gallon capacity external bucket to drop water and retardant onto the flames, flying about eight hours daily.

"We are anticipating a very active fire season this year, throughout the Southwest," said Sweet."

Hillcrest Aircraft Company, Inc., of Lewiston, ID also has a Bell 205A-1++ helicopter in Show Low fighting the Wallow Fire and a Bell 407 working the New Mexico side of the fires.

Loren Crea, Director of Flight Operations for Neptune Aviation in Missoula, Montana, reported that since early May, the company's P2V Neptune aerial tanker fleet has expanded from one to five in the fire area. Currently, the twin-engine tankers are attacking the Wallow fire from bases in Silver City and Albuquerque, New Mexico; Pueblo, Colorado, and Winslow, Arizona. The five airtankers are flying a cumulative total of 10-20 hours daily, each dropping 2,100 gallons of fire retardant per trip.

"The size of the fire, the heavy smoke, and the airspace around it are presenting challenges. A lot of aircraft are working this fire," said Crea.

Another air tanker operator, Aero Union Corporation of Sacramento, California, has had three modified P3 Orions in action for the past two weeks on the eastern Arizona fires, from bases in Winslow, Arizona and Silver City, New Mexico, according to company chief pilot Norm Cook.

"With a fire this big, the tankers are helping to build fire break lines around the West flank of the fire, to help protect the town of Greer," Cook explained. "The terrain is very steep and difficult for ground crews to gain access." In addition to the Wallow fire, Cook reported, Aero Union is also engaged in fighting the Murphy fire, south of Fort Huachuca, Arizona.

"Each aircraft is dropping 2,550 gallons of fire retardant per trip," he noted. "The support staff--a pilot, copilot, and crew chief, plus four to five ground-based staff--are putting in 10 to 12 hours of duty time per day, and each aircraft is flying six to eight hours daily, under high wind and heavy smoke conditions."

Aero Union, Columbia Helicopters, Hillcrest Aircraft, Intermountain Helicopter., and Neptune Aviation are members of the American Helicopter Services & Aerial Firefighting Association (AHSFA). AHSFA is the Washington-based trade association representing the private operators of helicopters and fixed wing aircraft before the US Department of Agriculture-Forest Service; the US Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management; the Bureau of Indian Affairs; the Fish and Wildlife Service; the National Park Service; and various State wild land firefighting agencies. The association represents its members on Capitol Hill by working with key Congressional offices for the promotion of aerial firefighting industry needs, and support, and at key government agency meetings to monitor and provide input on issues impacting the aerial firefighting industry. AHSFA also interfaces with other trade groups with common interests. END

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