



COUNTY OF VENTURA HEALTH CARE AGENCY		EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES POLICIES AND PROCEDURES	
Policy Title: Helicopter Dispatch for Emergency Medical Responses		Policy Number 1202	
APPROVED: Administration:	 Steven L. Carroll, Paramedic	Date: July 1, 2026	
APPROVED: Medical Director:	 Daniel Shepherd, MD	Date: July 1, 2026	
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- I. PURPOSE: To define dispatch procedures for helicopter emergency medical responses.
- II. AUTHORITY: Health and Safety Code, Division 2.5, Sections 1797.204, 1797.206, 1797.220, and 1798. California Code of Regulations, Title 22, Division 9, Chapter 7.
- III. DEFINITIONS:
 - A. Designated Dispatch Center: The designated dispatch center for air unit programs based in the County of Ventura will be the Ventura County Fire Protection District Fire Communications Center (FCC).
 - B. Automatic Response Area(s): Any remote area where the response time for ground ambulance personnel exceeds twenty-five (25) minutes as determined by the FCC Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system.
- IV. POLICY: Helicopters will be dispatched when an incident is in an Automatic Response Area or when requested by prehospital personnel on scene or enroute to an incident.
- V. PROCEDURE
 - A. Helicopters, staffed and equipped in accordance with VCEMS policies and procedures, will be dispatched by the designated dispatch center in the following manner:
 1. All requests for and cancellations of EMS helicopters at the scene of an emergency shall be made through FCC. The authority for requesting the dispatch of a helicopter for patient transport shall be vested with the on-scene public agency or other prehospital personnel that are authorized to function with the organized EMS system. This policy does not preclude the Ventura County Aviation Unit from responding to incidents requiring law enforcement response - including Search and Rescue (SAR) operations.
 2. FCC personnel will determine the appropriate aviation resources using information from on-scene public safety/prehospital personnel or from the reporting party if the patient is located in an Automatic Response Area.

3. No EMS helicopter shall respond to an incident without the request of and/or notification of FCC. All responding public safety/EMS personnel shall be notified of the dispatch of a helicopter
 4. Specific procedures will be drafted to account for the dispatch and utilization of air ambulance versus rescue aircraft, if/when an air ambulance service is licensed to operate by VCEMS for operations within the County of Ventura.
 5. A Ventura County Aviation Unit (VCAU) helicopter will be dispatched to incidents that describe the need for the specialized skills and capabilities of a rescue aircraft. If the VCAU helicopter is unavailable, mutual aid resources may be requested. Incidents that require a rescue helicopter may involve the need for:
 - a. Hoist operations: use of a mechanical device (“hoist”; attached to the helicopter) to lift a patient from a location inaccessible to ground personnel and transfer him/her into the cabin of the helicopter.
 - b. Short haul operations: use of a long line (attached to the helicopter) to lift a patient from a location inaccessible to ground personnel, and transport him/her to a location on the ground a short distance away where care may be provided.
 - c. The need for search capabilities, including the utilization of Night Vision Goggles (NVG).
- B. Helicopter transportation should be considered for all cases that meet criteria per VCEMS Policy 1203 - Criteria for Patient Emergency Transport by Helicopter
1. Helicopter transportation will not be used as a means of mitigating/bypassing hospital diversion guidelines.
- C. A helicopter response may be terminated:
1. By FCC if on-scene prehospital personnel determine that the helicopter is not needed.
 2. If the helicopter pilot and/or flight crew determine the call should be terminated for safety considerations.