

Sierra – Sacramento Valley EMS Agency Program Policy		
HEMS Aircraft Authorization, Classification & Operations		
	Effective: 04/01/2026	Next Review: 10/2028
	Approval: Troy M. Falck, MD – Medical Director	450
	Approval: John Poland – Executive Director	SIGNATURE ON FILE

PURPOSE:

To establish standards for the authorization, classification, and operations of HEMS aircraft/personnel.

AUTHORITY:

- A. HSC, Division 2.5, § 1797.200 – 1797.276, 1798 – 1798.8 & 1798.170.
- B. CCR, Title 22, Chapter 7.
- C. Federal Aviation Regulations, § 91.

DEFINITIONS:

- A. **Helicopter Emergency Medical Services (HEMS) Aircraft** – Rotor wing aircraft utilized for the purpose of prehospital emergency response and patient transport. HEMS aircraft include air ambulances and all ALS/BLS rescue aircraft.
- B. **Air Ambulance** – Any aircraft specially constructed, modified or equipped and used for the primary purpose of responding to emergency incidents and transporting critically ill and/or injured (life or limb) patients, whose medical flight crew has, at a minimum, two (2) attendants certified or licensed in advanced life support.
- C. **Rescue Aircraft** – Aircraft whose usual function is not patient transport but may be used for patient transport when the use of an air or ground ambulance is inappropriate or not readily available. Rescue aircraft are classified as one of the following:
 - 1. **Advanced Life Support (ALS) Rescue Aircraft** – A rescue aircraft whose medical flight crew has, at a minimum, one (1) attendant licensed as a paramedic.
 - 2. **Basic Life Support (BLS) Rescue Aircraft** – A rescue aircraft whose medical flight crew has, at a minimum, one (1) attendant certified as an EMT.
 - 3. **Auxiliary Rescue Aircraft** – A rescue aircraft that does not have a medical flight crew, or whose flight crew does not meet ALS/BLS rescue aircraft requirements.

POLICY:

- A. S-SV EMS is responsible for classifying/authorizing HEMS aircraft based within the S-SV EMS region, except that the California EMS Authority (EMSA) is responsible for classifying aircraft of the California Highway Patrol, CAL FIRE, and California National Guard. S-SV EMS classification/authorization will be provided by written agreements with HEMS aircraft providers.
- B. No person or organization shall provide or hold themselves out as providing HEMS aircraft services unless that organization has aircraft which have been classified/authorized by a local EMS agency (LEMSA) or, in the case of the California Highway Patrol, CAL FIRE, and California National Guard, by EMSA.
- C. Except for mutual aid requests, HEMS aircraft must be classified/authorized by S-SV EMS and possess a current/valid S-SV EMS air ambulance service provider permit to operate within the S-SV EMS region. A request from a designated dispatch center shall be deemed as authorization of aircraft operated by the California Highway Patrol, CAL FIRE, California National Guard, or the Federal Government.
- D. HEMS aircraft providers, owners, operators, or any hospital where a HEMS aircraft is based, housed, or stationed permanently or temporarily shall adhere to all federal, state, and local statutes, ordinances, policies, and procedures related to HEMS aircraft operations, including qualifications of flight crews and aircraft maintenance.
- E. All ALS HEMS aircraft shall employ a provider medical director who is a physician licensed in the State of California who by training and experience, is qualified in emergency medicine. The medical director shall be responsible for the supervision of the quality assurance/improvement program of air medical transport patient care.
- F. Medical Control:
 - 1. The medical direction/management of the EMS system shall be under the medical control of the S-SV EMS medical director.
 - 2. Flight paramedics shall operate under S-SV EMS policies/protocols. Paramedics employed by S-SV EMS authorized air ambulance providers who have been approved for Unified Paramedic Optional Scope of Practice may perform skills and administer medications in accordance with applicable S-SV EMS and/or HEMS aircraft provider approved policies/protocols.
 - 3. Flight RNs may perform skills and administer medications beyond the S-SV EMS paramedic scope of practice, in accordance with RN specific policies/protocols developed/approved by the provider's medical director and agreed to by the S-SV EMS medical director. HEMS aircraft provider patient care policies/protocols shall be submitted to S-SV EMS initially and upon subsequent revision.
- G. Personnel:
 - 1. Air ambulances shall be staffed with a minimum of two (2) ALS medical flight crew members. Staffing can be achieved with any combination of:

- a. S-SV EMS accredited paramedic.
- b. Registered nurse (RN) who has successfully completed an S-SV EMS paramedic accreditation course or similar S-SV EMS approved training.
2. Rescue aircraft shall be staffed with a minimum of one (1) S-SV EMS accredited paramedic or EMT medical flight crew member, based on their classification level.
3. The medical flight crew of HEMS aircraft shall have training in aeromedical transportation equivalent to DOT Air Medical Crew National Standard Curriculum.
4. Medical flight crews shall participate in such continuing education requirements as required by their license/certification.
5. In situations where the flight crew is less medically qualified than the ground personnel from whom they receive patients; they may only assume patient care responsibility in accordance with applicable S-SV EMS policies/protocols.

H. Communications:

1. HEMS aircraft providers shall be honest, open, ethical, and responsible for accurately informing the air ambulance coordination center and/or requesting PSAP of any changes in availability or response status. This shall include any circumstance and/or activity that will delay their ability to respond (maintenance, training flights, interfacility transports, need for refueling, etc.).
2. HEMS aircraft shall provide an updated ETA to the air ambulance coordination center, requesting PSAP and/or designated LZ contact when enroute.
3. All communications between HEMS aircraft and the designated LZ contact should be done using CALCORD operational frequency of 156.075.
4. HEMS aircraft shall have the capability of communicating directly, while in flight, with the following entities:
 - a. Required FAA facilities.
 - b. Air ambulance coordination center and/or requesting PSAP.
 - c. Ground units.
 - d. Base, modified base and receiving hospitals.
 - e. S-SV EMS air to air EMS aircraft on frequency 123.025.
5. Air ambulance providers shall notify the applicable air ambulance coordination center when entering/flying through their geographical area. The air ambulance coordination center will inform air ambulance personnel of any other known aircraft activities in the area (fire suppression, other responding aircraft, etc.).

-
6. Air ambulance coordination centers will not routinely perform flight-following operations with HEMS aircraft. This will remain the responsibility of the requesting PSAP and/or the HEMS aircraft provider's dispatch center.
 7. Each permitted HEMS resource is responsible for maintaining current availability status in EMResource.
- I. Air Ambulance Coordination Center Data Recording and Reporting:
1. Air ambulance coordination centers shall adequately record all air ambulance resource request activities.
 2. Air ambulance coordination centers shall provide air ambulance coordination data to S-SV EMS upon request.
- J. Space & Equipment:
1. HEMS aircraft shall be configured so that:
 - a. There is sufficient space to accommodate one (1) patient on a stretcher and one (1) patient attendant. Air ambulances shall have space to accommodate one (1) patient and two (2) patient attendants, at a minimum.
 - b. There is sufficient space for medical personnel to have adequate patient access to carry out necessary procedures on the ground and in the air.
 - c. There is sufficient space for medical equipment and supplies required by applicable regulations and S-SV EMS policies.
 2. HEMS aircraft shall have adequate safety belts and tie-downs for all personnel, patients, stretchers, and equipment to prevent inadvertent movement.
 3. HEMS aircraft shall have onboard equipment and supplies commensurate with the scope of practice of the medical flight crew, as approved by S-SV EMS.
 4. HEMS aircraft shall be equipped with a radio headset for each crew member, ride along and patient. Each crew member headset should allow for communications with ground stations, base/modified base and receiving hospitals.
-