



Interagency Aviation Information Bulletin



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Subject: Pacific Northwest (Region 6) UAS Modules to field test ground-based AFF units.

Area of Concern: Flight Operations

Distribution: All Aviation Operations

Discussion: Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) are increasingly supporting wildland fire operations across the country. As their use expands, so too does the need for structured communication and situational awareness across helibases, dispatch centers, and piloted aviation assets.

A series of recent SAFECOM submissions, along with a tactical pause, has highlighted a trend of communication failures and a lack of timely reporting. Several SAFECOM reports, including [25-0524](#), [25-0468](#), [24-1039](#), and [24-1000](#), document these issues. A recent Eastern Region tactical pause was initiated due to these communication failures and delays in aircraft notifications. In response to this trend, the National UAS Program is emphasizing the need for improved coordination this fire season.

To address these issues, the Pacific Northwest USFS UAS Program is initiating field testing of Automated Flight Following (AFF) units for UAS modules. This initiative aims to provide dispatchers and helibase personnel with enhanced real-time awareness of UAS activity and improve deconfliction with other aircraft. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) will be developed to guide Regional Specialists, dispatchers, and helibase personnel during AFF integration and communications testing. Only UAS modules assigned to incidents within the USFS UAS Program and Region 6 will be equipped with ground-based AFF units. Field testing will continue until adequate feedback is received on the benefits and improvements.

Key Reminders:

- Direct face-to-face or radio briefings between UAS modules and helibase/dispatch staff remain the preferred method of coordination when feasible.
- Communication gaps are not the fault of any one group—shared responsibility and early coordination are essential to reducing risk.
- In zoned helibase (hub/spoke) operations, or where helibase is not managing flight following, UAS personnel must coordinate with dispatch to receive aircraft notifications and ensure this information is relayed to all relevant parties.

Consideration should be given to rostering qualified UAS Leaders (UASL) for Complex Incident Management Teams (CIMTs) to alleviate coordination burdens and ensure safe airspace integration. For additional information, contact Salvador Blanco, Region 6 USFS UAS Coordinator:

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