



POLICY AND PROCEDURE

MONTGOMERY COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

NO. 24-09

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7/15/2014

RESPONSE FOR AIRCRAFT EMERGENCIES

MONTGOMERY COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE POLICY

RESPONSE FOR AIRCRAFT EMERGENCIES

Issued by: Fire Chief

Policy No. 24-09

Authority: Montgomery County Code Section 21-2.(d)(2)

Effective Date: July 15, 2014

Section 1. Purpose: To establish standard mitigation procedure and safety guidelines for the use of MCFRS personnel when they respond for aircraft (airplane or helicopter) emergencies.

Section 2. Applicability: This policy applies to all MCFRS personnel and units when dispatched to, or operating on, an incident involving an aircraft emergency.

Section 3. Definitions.

- a. **Airport/Airpark Manager.** The overall coordinator for an airport or airpark facility ("Airport," "Airpark," or "Facility"), whose duties include being responsible for publishing the facility's emergency procedure manual.
- b. **Automated Weather Observing System (AWOS).** The broadcast frequency that continuously transmits the local weather conditions at the Airpark. The Gaithersburg Airpark AWOS frequency is 128.275.
- c. **Davis Airport/Airfield.** The 2,000 foot long, paved single runway airstrip located off Route 108 near Hawkins Creamery Road. This airport operates only during daylight hours, and makes available on-site refueling, minor maintenance services, and mostly exterior tie-down/parking.
- d. **Gaithersburg Airpark (GAI).** The 4,200 foot long, paved single runway airstrip located off Woodfield Road. The Airpark operates 24 hours a day, and makes available on-site refueling, a full range of maintenance services, multiple enclosed hangar aircraft parking, and exterior tie-down/parking.
- e. **Heliport.** An identified area used or intended to be used for helicopter landings and takeoffs. Within Montgomery County, these heliport facilities operate at local hospitals, private business sites, and military installations.



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- f. **Potomac Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON).** The communication system related to protecting or responding to emergencies regarding the airspace over Montgomery County.
- g. **Runway Safety Area (RSA).** The rectangular area or otherwise configured safety zone that surrounds the airport runway, and accommodates aircraft that may veer off the runway. Fire/rescue personnel consider the RSA to be the space within 100 feet in all directions along both sides of the runway.
- h. **Universal Communications (UNICOM).** An air-to-ground communication system (radio frequency) operated by a private agency to provide advisory service at uncontrolled airports (*i.e.*, airports **not** controlled by an Air Traffic Controller) In this system, aircraft broadcast their location(s) and intentions to land or take off. The UNICOM radio frequency for the Gaithersburg Airpark is 123.075. The UNICOM frequency for Davis Airfield is 122.800.

Section 4. Policy Statement. It is MCFRS policy to provide standard operating procedures to guide personnel responding to, or operating at, an aircraft emergency, to enhance their ability to work as safely as possible while mitigating the incident swiftly and effectively. Because aircraft emergencies can occur anywhere, guidelines for responding to these incidents are not limited only to designated airports/airparks.

Aircraft incidents have the potential to be mass casualty events, and may also involve incident types that include combinations of fire, hazardous materials, and the need for wide-area searches. For responses to incidents involving aircraft emergencies and crashes, personnel must follow the procedures below to enhance their own safety and that of any potential viable patients while operating on the incident scene, to mitigate the emergency condition, and to protect the environment from the release of any hazardous materials.

Personnel must also be aware that aircraft emergencies often involve the response of local, state, and federal agencies to conduct accident investigation procedures at the scene for extended periods of time. Areas related to these incidents may also become crime scenes, involving investigation by local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.



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Section 5. Procedure.

- a. **Size-Up and Initial Action.** MCFRS units must provide timely and effective communications and reports when they engage in aviation response operations. The four components of these reports are: Initial On-Scene Reports (IOSRs); Establishing Command; Unit/Group/Division Assignments; and Situation Reports.
- b. **Locating/Searching for the Incident.** Often, aircraft emergency incidents are dispatched without a specific location. In those cases, the first due unit should:
 1. respond to the dispatched incident location and search for the reported aircraft involved in the emergency; and
 2. gather and report information on the observation, direction, and any other aspects of the incident necessary to assign units or otherwise respond to the emergency.
- c. **Initial On-Scene Report.** The first arriving unit will assess the situation, compose a clear, concise radio transmission, and provide the IOSR components below to ECC:
 1. Determine/identify the exact location of the incident;
 2. Indicate the type of aircraft involved, and determine/provide its identification number;
 3. Describe the conditions evident on arrival; and
 4. Request any additional resources needed.
- d. **Establish Command.** The first arriving primary unit will establish Command. The first arriving Unit Officer will operate in one of the Command Modes and announce that Command Mode as the unit engages in operations.
- e. **Assign Units/Groups/Divisions: First Arriving Unit.** Because aircraft emergency incidents often occur at locations other than airport grounds or heliports/pads, the first arriving unit must:



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1. identify Geographic Divisions;
 2. direct the responding units to Stage, or proceed to the incident location and engage in specific tasks;
 3. establish Groups based on the nature of the emergency incident, i.e., Firefighting, EMS, and Hazardous Materials; and,
 4. identify Supervisors.
- f. **Apparatus Response and Staging.** When designating units to Stage, the first arriving Unit Officer will assign a Staging Officer to coordinate the Staging resources.
1. Whenever possible, all units should remain on hard surfaces.
 2. Apparatus should **not** drive across surfaces that are covered in foam.
 3. All Unit Officers must use extreme caution when operating on soft ground surfaces (i.e., grass, fields, etc.), and must maintain situational awareness.
 4. Unit Officers must plan the area required to complete a task assignment, leaving adequate space for set-up, operations, and movement into and out of the scene.
 5. All support apparatus may be positioned on the taxiway or ramp areas designated by the Incident Commander (IC).
- g. **Incident Priorities.** The priorities for aircraft incidents closely match those for structure fires, i.e., Life Safety, Incident Stabilization, and Property Conservation. Obvious rescues and triage/patient care are prioritized before extinguishment and hazardous materials.
- h. **Approaching Aircraft.** Personnel must **not** approach an aircraft until it has stopped moving.
1. Only the personnel and units that have been approved by the IC may approach the aircraft.



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2. Apparatus that are approaching a crashed or downed aircraft *must use extreme caution*, and must *always be aware* of the potential for victims who are in the path of apparatus.
3. Personnel must **not** approach closer than 50 feet of an aircraft until all aircraft engines are shut down, and rotating propellers or rotor blades have stopped moving.
4. When practical, personnel should approach the aircraft from upwind and uphill.
5. Personnel approaching aircraft must approach directly in-line with the nose/front of the aircraft.
6. Personnel must take special precautions around aircraft possessing "bubble canopies" that are part of an explosive ejection system.
 - i. **Responding to Gaithersburg Airpark or Davis Airfield.** Airports are high-risk locations because they encompass fuel storage tanks, various types of communication systems, and both parked and moving planes. Unit Officers ***must maintain continuous situational awareness*** to ensure the safety of personnel and unit activities. If the emergency occurs at a designated airport/airpark, the first arriving MCFRS Unit Officer must contact the **Airport Manager** or witnesses, and:
 1. gather information about the incident from the **Airport Manager** or witnesses about the nature of the incident, its location, and other critical facts; and
 2. contact ECC and request the appropriate aviation flight center be contacted to advise nearby and incoming aircraft that ***"the runway at Gaithersburg/Davis is UNSAFE!"***
 - j. **When MCFRS Units *Must* Enter the Runway.** The runways at both **Gaithersburg Airpark** and **Davis Airfield** are **not** controlled by an Air Traffic Controller. Therefore, it is critical that Unit Officers ***must maintain continuous situational awareness*** of units and personnel when operating in those areas. To enhance the safety of units and personnel working on the runway or within the runway safety area, the IC/designee must take the actions below:



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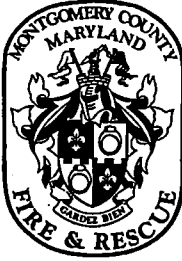
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1. The IC/designee must require the **Airport Manager, TRACON,** and **ECC** to announce that ***"the runway at Gaithersburg/Davis is UNSAFE!"***
 2. The IC/designee must also transmit the message above on the aircraft aviation radio via the **UNICOM** channel. Aviation radios are carried on RS717, PE728, and by Battalion Chief 703.
 3. The IC/designee must repeat the transmission at five minute intervals that ***"the runway at Gaithersburg/Davis is UNSAFE!"***
 4. The IC/designee must designate a spotter unit to be responsible for alerting all units working in the runway of approaching aircraft. The spotter unit must use the aircraft radio to broadcast ***"the runway at Gaithersburg/Davis is UNSAFE!"***, to alert approaching aircraft not to land on the runway. The spotter must continue to repeat this transmission at five minute intervals.
- k. **Safety on the Scene.** Units responding to mitigate aircraft emergencies must use caution when approaching the area to perform fire suppression, rescue individuals in the aircraft, and operate in close proximity to the scene. Aircraft emergency incidents are often spread over a large area, and these areas often contain potential biohazards, unstable fuel products, sharp metal, and broken glass. Many aircraft are equipped with a parachute safety system that will cause serious injury if deployed into personnel.
- l. The responding IC/designee must ensure that all personnel wear structural firefighting personal protective equipment, including Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus. In addition:
1. All units must work in teams to accomplish the objectives to confine, rescue, and mitigate the emergency condition.
 2. All personnel must maintain situational awareness.
 3. The Unit Officers must provide frequent situational updates to Command on the progress and/or request additional resources required to mitigate the emergency incident.



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- 4. If possible, the Unit Officer must identify the aircraft by the "N" sequence on its tail, and provide this information to Command.

- m. **Incident Termination.** Terminating an aircraft emergency incident is a controlled process. All aircraft emergency incidents require an investigation by a local, state, and/or federal agency. Once the emergency condition is mitigated, the need for fire/rescue suppression resources will scale back. The IC must assure an orderly transfer to the appropriate on-scene authority. MCFRS units must continue to maintain situational awareness of the conditions, and the IC must:
 - 1. transmit the appropriate updates to ECC, stating the current conditions and any resources required; and
 - 2. coordinate the transfer of control of the incident scene with the appropriate on-scene authority.

Section 6. Implementation and Enforcement. The Fire Chief is the implementation and enforcement authority for all policies and regulations of the Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service.

Section 7. Effective date. This policy is effective on July 15, 2014.

Approved:

Steven E. Lohr, Fire Chief
Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service

Date

APPROVED AS TO FORM AND LEGALITY
OFFICE OF COUNTY ATTORNEY

BY Richard N. McDermott
DATE 7/1/14