

National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group

3833 South Development Avenue; Boise, ID 83705

NMAC Correspondence 2018-14

July 20, 2018

To: Geographic Area Coordination Group Chairs
From: National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC)
Subject: High Volume of Airspace Conflicts

A trend has been established this fire season regarding airspace conflicts. Unfortunately, this is not a new problem. Looking back, there are at least six interagency approaches to promoting mitigations for airspace conflicts. Typically, but not exclusively, airspace conflicts occur in the low level environment (below 500 feet above ground level) between fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. In past years airspace related awareness documents with nearly identical findings and recommendations included: Interagency Aviation Safety Alerts (IASA, 06-04), Interagency Aviation Lesson Learned (IALL, 08-03), Interagency Aviation Accident Prevention Bulletin (IAAPB, 11-03), IASA 12-02, IASA 12-04, IALL 17-04 and [NMAC Correspondence 2017-13](#). Other than the NMAC document, the others can be accessed via:

<https://www.fs.fed.us/managing-land/fire/avsafety> or <https://www.doi.gov/aviation/safety>:

Common Findings:

- Frequency congestion and/or confusion
- Radio transmissions not being acknowledged
- Frequency saturation during ASM/ATGS transitions
- Not briefing all relevant information during transitions
- Confusion about who is “controlling” aircraft (ATGS versus Leadplane)
- Difficulty managing traffic between load and returns
- Failure to see and avoid
- Loss of situational awareness.

Common Recommendations:

- Follow established procedures
- Acknowledge and comply with airspace management instructions
- Establish fences, checkpoints, and ingress/egress routes
- Utilize a HLCO, ASM or Lead Plane to assist with span of control
- Follow briefing checklist from the Interagency Aerial Supervision Guide (current)



National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group

3833 South Development Avenue; Boise, ID 83705

- Do not transition incident airspace or proceed low-level without clearance
- Visually and verbally confirm aircraft are clear
- Hold all helicopters well clear of fixed wing low-level operations
- Assign specific altitudes to facilitate effective separation within FTA/TFR airspace
- Influence the tempo of aircraft departures from helibases and/or tanker bases
- Manage distractions, interruptions and preoccupations (DIP)
- Pause air operations when positive control is compromised
- Conduct After Action Reviews (AAR) to optimize learning

Reviewing alerts and bulletins alone will not fix the airspace conflict issues occurring in Fire Traffic Areas (FTA), or if in place, Temporary Flight Restricted (TFR) airspace. Take some time to discuss these issues in depth with pilots, crews, aerial supervisors, Air Operations Branch Directors (AOBD), Incident Commanders (IC), Fire Management Officers (FMO), dispatchers, etc. Recognize when fire operations have reached a tipping point; when the fire intensity, communication, and congestion no longer permits safe aerial operations. The recommendations listed above should not be a response to an airspace conflict, rather, utilize them from the beginning to avoid airspace conflicts altogether prior to engaging operations.

Encourage all aviation personnel and those tasked with oversight to remain hyper-aware and continue to reevaluate established aviation hazards facilitating airspace conflicts, and identify new hazards that have remained latent to the system. Develop and implement mitigations utilizing the listed recommendations as a foundation. For example, decreasing the volume of aircraft in an area of operations due to challenging terrain, wire hazards or changing visibility. Utilize a flight risk assessment tool (FRAT) methodology.

Everyone is working hard to get the job done, but don't be afraid to slow the operational tempo and set limitations on aviation resources. Carefully weigh the benefits of adding another aircraft to the FTA or TFR and determine how that will impact the span of control.

Attachment 1: Airspace Conflict Statistics 2018

Please give this wide distribution. Contact Jarrod Simontacchi with any questions 208-387-5662 or jsimonta@blm.gov.

/s/ Dan Smith
Chair, NMAC

