BLM Aviation

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Subject: How to Properly Refuse Risk (Aviation)

Background: Recently two Single Engine Airtankers (SEATs) were dispatched to assist an Air Tactical Group Supervisor (ATGS) suppress a wildland fire during the initial attack phase. The ATGS successfully directed the first two SEATs dispatched and requested a load and return. Based on the ATGS's request for more retardant (load and return) two additional SEATs were loaded at the same airbase and sent to the incident to work with the ATGS. En route the two additional SEATs determined the weather was not conducive to fly to the fire and notified ATGS and dispatch that they needed to return to the airport. The two additional SEATs successfully flew to the pre-identified jettison area, jettisoned their loads and returned to the airport/airbase. During that period the initial two SEATs dispatched returned to the airport/airbase.

The first two SEATs to arrive back at the airport proceeded to tie down their aircraft as inclement weather was moving over the airport area and beyond. The ATGS remained on the incident as the weather did not directly affect the fire area and flight of safety concerns.

Soon after the last two SEATs had landed at the airport/airbase another dispatch was received for a different incident. The Airbase Manager handed the dispatch information to the four pilots at which point the pilots responded they did not feel they could safely fly, based on the weather. After a very short discussion about the weather between the flight crews and airbase staff it was determined that the flight crews did not feel they could safely fly to the new incident.

Unfortunately, during the short discussion about the weather and additional dispatch requests, the aviation risk management tools previously developed were not used to facilitate discussion that could have led to a risk based decision and an open forum to discuss the mission at hand.

Listed below are Risk Management Tools to facilitate open dialogue and expectations between flight crews and aviation employees during critical phases of flight planning.

Risk Management tools:

1. Daily Risk Assessment
2. Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations, Chpt. 16, How to Properly Refuse Risk (Aviation)
3. Incident Response Pocket Guide, Aviation Watch Out Situations

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