CIVIL AIRCRAFT RESPONSE DURING COVID19 RESPONSE

Coordination of Aircraft during COVID19 Response

During the COVID 19 response air assets are a vital resource for emergency services, and the UK response to COVID19 can be expected by Search and Rescue, Police, HEMS and Air Ambulance aircraft. Additionally, both the fire service and ambulance service have access to drones; public interest motivates news-gathering helicopters, and the military or civil sector may also supply aviation resources.

Emergency service and military aircraft will be using the procedures established for coordination of emergency services aircraft at a major incident and contained in the Combined Tactical Air Cell (CTAC) and Helicopter Emergency Liaison Plan documents. The relevant procedures are detailed in Annex A: Helicopter Emergency Liaison Plan (HELP).

Before commencing tasking during the COVID19 response pilots should familiarise themselves with the procedures detailed in Annex A.

Civil Aircraft Procedures:

During the COVID19 response the standard of services provided by Airports and Air Traffic will vary throughout the country, it is important that the safe operation of aircraft is maintained. Operators may be tasked to locations and landing sites where other air assets are operating and the lack of services provided mean an enhanced look out and adherence to procedures is important to maintain safe operations.

Landing sites established during the response will have different levels of services. There will be landing sites without any air traffic control services or radio facilities, due to the number of assets possibly using these sites the procedures detailed below should be used.

Pilots should use the SAFETYCOM frequency **135.480** for all operations in the vicinity of landing sites without radio facilities. It should only be used at locations having no radio facilities. If another VHF assignment is valid for that location, it must be used even outside the normal operating hours.

Arriving aircraft should transmit the following details when within a maximum range of 5nm of the intended landing site:

      i. Name of Landing site

      ii. The callsign of the aircraft

      iii. Present location and altitude/height

      iv. POB

      v. Intention and direction of approach

      vi. Name of Landing Site

Departing aircraft should state

      i. "To all stations"

      ii. The callsign of the aircraft

      iii. The location either by name or by reference to a readily identifiable feature

      iv. POB

      v. The direction and height of the intended departure

ANNEX A   Helicopter Emergency Liaison Plan (HELP)

Priorities

Early stages of a major incident are invariably chaotic, with the possibility of poor weather and no single person having a clear picture of the emergency. It is quite likely that an unknown quantity of aviation assets may be dispatched rapidly and independently to the same location. Different agencies may have different objectives, but potential conflicts can be resolved by *prioritising the preservation of life.* If doubt exists, then the first police/SAR aircraft arriving on scene will provide guidance to deconflict subsequent arrivals. On the ground, it is entirely probable that a Combined Tactical Air Cell (CTAC) will be established within hours to manage the incident. From this point onwards, tasking will be controlled centrally and resources directed accordingly. Monitoring appropriate communication channels throughout will provide an overview of how the incident is beginning to develop.

Presumption should never be made that other assets will not be involved and already operating near the scene.

Communications

Effective communication is the most important aspect of a multi-agency response, but usually the hardest to achieve. Arriving aircraft should be listening on the LOCAL ATC FREQUENCY to develop situational awareness and minimise conflict, broadcasting their intentions (blind, if necessary) on 123.1 MHz (Scene of SAR) while inbound. The first police/SAR aircraft present will adopt the callsign "Air Co-ordinator" to provide guidance and updated information for other commanders on the evolving situation and possible landing sites.

Mutual respect, good airmanship, and adherence to CTAC procedures will minimise risk of collision

Emergency service aircraft are also fitted with Airwave radios, enabling secure transmissions to ground units such as fire, police, and ambulance services. Inter-agency communication should be conducted on the default ES3 TALKGROUP, with ES1 and ES2 as spare. Point-to-point chatter places excess burden on the network and inhibits both the flow of information and ability to listen, so must be avoided whenever possible.

Every transmission relating to the incident should be concise, relevant, and informative

Mountain Rescue Teams (MRT) are highly likely to be engaged on some incidents, in which case CHANNEL 62A (156.125 MHz) can be used by suitably-equipped aircraft. For maritime incidents, CHANNEL 16 (156.8 MHz) may also be usefully monitored. Other frequencies which could prove useful are 135.480 MHz (SAFETYCOM) and 122.955 MHz (DEPCOM), which might be considered to prevent the scene of SAR frequency becoming overloaded.

Deconfliction

Commanders may be working particularly hard in challenging conditions but should resist any temptation to become distracted by the nature of the task. Regardless of the airspace in which an incident has occurred, visual acquisition remains the most valuable method to avoid collision. Aircraft should also consider approaching incidents at non- standard altitudes to ensure vertical separation from other assets. Whenever drones are tasked to operate near a major incident then ground communications should be established prior to launching, to achieve both safe and legal separation from other aviation assets.

Ultimate responsibility for deconfliction resides with aircraft commanders, and CTAC procedures should not be interpreted as a devolution of this obligation.

The Air Picture

The UK Emergency Air Response Group has agreed that a Combined Tactical Air Cell (CTAC) will be formed to manage the response to enduring major incidents; callsign will be "CTAC-ONE" and the CTAC may assume the role of Air Co-ordination Officer (ACO) from the first aircraft on scene. The ACO will develop a plan for flow deconfliction and establish a Restricted Area if required. In such circumstances, commanders should comply with ACO instructions and follow the plan as described. The generation of an AIR PICTURE will assist in the deconfliction of aircraft and HELP is part of this process: a simple reference which should be kept in the cockpit to provide guidance for pilots on the expectations of everybody else involved.

The AIR PICTURE will be managed on 123.1 MHz (scene of SAR), and defined by the following terms:

a) INCIDENT LOCATION - Grid Ref of Landing Zone relating to the incident, near an obvious landmark if possible

b) HOLDING POINTS (x2) - between 1000` -2000`and named sequentially for entry and exit points

c) FINAL APPROACH POINT (FAP) - 1000` access point for aircraft approaching the incident

d) APPROACH DIRECTION - usually into wind, but local geography may require a different direction

e) EXIT POINT - 1000` egress point for aircraft departing the incident
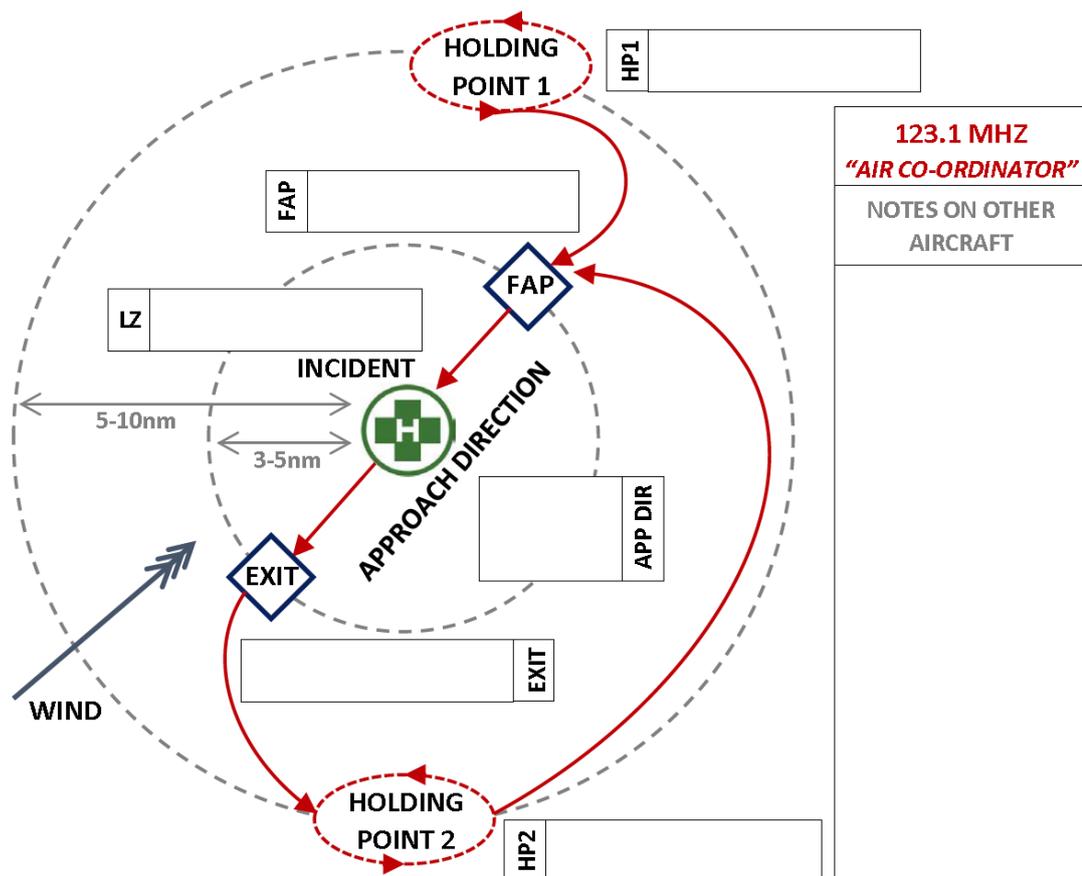
Following contact with the CTAC, commanders are encouraged to annotate the above diagram with appropriate grids to ensure common information is shared between participating aircraft. It is recognised that the complexity of most incidents may not easily be described by an AIR PICTURE, but compliance with these procedures will benefit all concerned parties. Non-standard joins or departures can be requested through CTAC to expedite casualty evacuation, but commanders are unlikely to have a complete awareness of situational priorities and should therefore comply with assigned tasks whilst respecting the proximity of other airspace users.