



International Fire Aviation Working Group (IFAWG) – Second Meeting

8 May 2011

Conclusions and Recommendations

Background

The International Fire Aviation Working Group (IFAWG) is an advisory committee of the UNISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group (WFAG) / UNISDR Global Wildland Fire Network (GWFN).

The International Fire Aviation Group was formed following a workshop on Fire Aviation at the 4th International Wildland Fire Conference in Seville, Spain in 2007 to identify and facilitate opportunities for multilateral communication and cooperation to improve the safety, efficiency and effectiveness of aerial fire management, principally through:

- Sharing of relevant information, especially information that will support the promotion and improvement of safety in the sector;
- Providing a conduit or facilitation mechanism for the sharing of resources between jurisdictions;
- Identifying of opportunities for harmonisation of operating practices and establishment of consistent standards, where appropriate; and recommend or initiate suitable harmonisation action, including the development of voluntary guidelines.
- Providing advice and guidance to nations and the United Nations regarding fire aviation through the UNISDR Wildland Fire Advisory Group / Global Wildland Fire Network.

The full Charter of the Group is available at www.ifawg.org.

The IFAWG met in conjunction with the Fifth International Wildland Fire Conference in South Africa in May 2011.

The Group discussed the increasingly valuable role being played by aerial means in supporting fire and forest management, in particular in gathering intelligence and information to support operations, in rapid intervention to incipient wildfires and in fire prevention and risk reduction operations. The group also noted concerns regarding reported incidences of ineffective and potentially unsafe application of aerial means. The group reinforced the importance of:

- Safe operating practices;
- Deployment decisions to be made as part of a risk-based framework that properly considers costs and benefits of deployment;
- Aerial means to be applied as part of a fully integrated approach, working in conjunction with ground-based operations.

The group also considered opportunities for improving the sharing of aircraft and support resources between jurisdictions. It was noted that effective sharing of resources internationally offered potential to utilise relatively expensive and specialised resources in the most efficient and effective manner. The group considered that in order to improve the potential for sharing resources it was necessary to:

- Further develop bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements that set out pre-planned deployment and operating arrangements; and to

- Develop and implement consistent standards and operating practices for international deployment.

The meeting closely considered the development of voluntary guidelines containing standards and consistent operating practices, noting that such guidelines would have the benefits of:

- Identifying best management practices that agencies could adopt to optimise safe and effective aerial operations; and
- Facilitating the development of common standards and operating practices to support safe and effective deployment of aircraft and support resources between jurisdictions.

The group therefore initiated a significant project to identify appropriate standards and best-management practices that will underpin development of voluntary guidelines.

The IFAWG recommends to conference participants the inclusion of the following in the conference statement.

Recommendations

The conference acknowledges the valuable supporting role played by aerial means in fire and forest management. The conference also acknowledges and supports the benefits of sharing aircraft and support resources between jurisdictions. The conference recommends that:

- Agencies and groups develop methodologies to ensure that aerial means are safely applied as part of an integrated approach to fire and forest management, and are deployed according to assessed risk and sound economic principles.
- Agencies continue to develop bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements that set out pre-planned arrangements and operating practices to facilitate safe and effective deployment of aerial means between jurisdictions.
- Agencies and groups work together to develop voluntary guidelines regarding standards and operating practices for aerial means, in order to promote best management practices and in order to support safe and effective deployment of resources between jurisdictions; and that agencies support the International Fire Aviation Working Group's project to identify appropriate standards and best-management practices on which to base the development of voluntary guidelines.