

Use of Air Observers

The ACT Rural Fire Service Chief Officer has issued this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) under Section 38(1) of the *Emergencies Act 2004* – A Chief Officer may determine standards and protocols.

Purpose

This procedure describes the callout arrangements for air observers, their roles and responsibilities.

Scope

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is applicable to personnel who act as Air Observers for ACT RFS activities.

Background

An Air Observer is responsible for obtaining accurate intelligence information of fire activity and fire control progress from an aircraft. Their primary duties are fire detection and fire reconnaissance. Air observers may be dispatched to obtain specific information, making direct contact with ground crews and supplying fire information requested by them. Air Observers may also be utilised by other agencies to assist, e.g., a missing person search or flood monitoring.

An Air Observer will not give command instructions in relation to the fire unless specifically tasked for that purpose or in an emergency situation.

The provision of timely and accurate information to the Incident Management Team (IMT) is a high priority. If conditions are likely to prevent intelligence gathering, the flight should be terminated.

The ACT RFS Chief Officer (RFS CO), RFS Duty Officer (RFS DO) or Incident Controller (IC) or RFS Aviation Officer may at any time override the air observer tasking and authorise priority use of the aircraft.

Responsibilities

Air Observer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct pre-flight checks to ensure they have all required equipment and safety devices • Provide pilot briefing and direction • Detect, map and report fires • Complete post-flight requirements
RFS Duty Officer (DO) / Aviation Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct callout, brief on tasking
RFS CO/RFS SO, IC, AOM, Aviation Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terminate/change air observer tasking if required.

Applicability of this SOP

This SOP applies to the use of ACT RFS air observers engaged in activities for the ACT RFS.

Air Observer Procedure

Callout

The RFS DO, RFS Aviation Officer, Incident Controller or Air Operations Manager call out air observers. The RFS Aviation Officer will use the Air Observer Roster to determine which Air Observer to engage.

Qualifications and skills

Only members with the appropriate Air Observer qualifications are eligible to work in this role. Skills required include:

- aerial reconnaissance flight plan preparation
- map reading and navigating from an aircraft
- working knowledge of Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS)
- use of Global Positioning System (GPS)
- intelligence gathering.

For details of the Air Observer qualification, refer to the ACT RFS Training Information Book.

Responsibilities

An Air Observer will conduct the following activities:

- pre-flight checks to ensure they have all required PPE, PPC and equipment
- fire detection
- fire mapping and reconnaissance
- pilot briefing and pilot direction
- fire reporting
- post-flight requirements
- other taskings as authorised.


Details of requirements for conducting these activities are provided in the training program for the Air Observer qualification.

Document information

Version history

Author	Version	Version Approval Date	Summary of Changes
Andrew Stark	1.0	15/02/2011	Previously SOP 2.2
Rohan Scott	2.0 Draft	25/02/2020	Reviewed and Updated
Simon May	3.1	2/03/2023	Reviewed and Updated

Approved by

Name	Title/Role	Signature	Date
Rohan Scott	CO ACT RFS		08/02/2024

Document Owner

Position	Section
RFS Director	Operations

Next review due: 01/02/2027

Related documents

Document name
NSW and ACT Aviation Standard Operating Procedures 2022 – Version 4.2
2.2.1 Aircraft Operations Standard Operating Procedure
ACT RFS Training Information Book

Signed documents will be scanned and filed in TRIM.