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TO: ORANGE COUNTY EMS AGENCY DISTRIBUTION LIST

FROM: SAM J. STRATTON, MD, MPH
MEDICAL DIRECTOR, ORANGE COUNTY EMS AGENCY

SUBJECT: PREHOSPITAL EMS AIR RESCUE

A number of concerns and questions have recently been forwarded to Orange County EMS (OCEMS) related to EMS helicopter rescue in Orange County. The aim of this memorandum is to address the primary concerns that have been raised regarding EMS air rescue.

The following California Regulations and local policies apply to prehospital EMS air rescue in Orange County:

1. California Code of Regulations, Title 22 (Social Security), Div 9, Chpt 8: Prehospital EMS Air Regulations (Effective Date January 1, 2016).
2. Orange County EMS Agency Policy # 730.15: Ambulance Rules and Regulations; Air Rescue-BLS and ALS Air Rescue Service Provider Criteria (Effective Date April 1, 2015).
3. Orange County EMS Agency Policy # 325.05: Air Rescue Unit Inventory (Effective Date April 1, 2016).

OCEMS is the "Authorizing EMS agency" for EMS aircraft utilized within the Orange County "Jurisdiction of origin" (CA Title 22, Div 9, Chpt 8, sec 100289 and 100290). EMS aircraft includes air ambulances and all categories of rescue aircraft (CA Title 22, Div 9, Chpt 8, sec 100279).

The following are questions and replies:

1. What EMS air services are available in Orange County?

Reply:

Two categories of EMS air service are available:

1. Primary service of helicopter ambulance service (ALS-nurse staffed configuration).
2. Secondary helicopter rescue services [both basic life support - EMT (BLS) and advanced life support – paramedic (ALS)].

In addition, fixed wing medical transport services regulated by the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration operate from John Wayne Airport.

2. How does OCEMS define EMS air rescue?

Reply:

EMS air rescue is appropriate use of a hoist (electric cable-lift, suspended from a hovering helicopter) to extract an ill or injured person from a remote location where landing a helicopter is not safe or possible. Rescue of a stranded person who is not ill or injured is not included as EMS air rescue.

The following is the broader California legal definition of “rescue aircraft”:

CA Title 22, Div 9, Chpt 8 § 100281. Rescue Aircraft: *“Rescue aircraft” as used in this Chapter means an aircraft whose usual function is not prehospital emergency patient transport but which may be utilized, in compliance with local EMS policy, for prehospital emergency patient transport when use of an air or ground ambulance is inappropriate or unavailable. Rescue aircraft includes ALS rescue aircraft, BLS rescue aircraft and Auxiliary rescue aircraft.*

3. Who are authorized prehospital EMS air rescue providers in Orange County?

Reply:

Four providers deliver Orange County EMS air rescue:

1. Orange County Fire Authority (ALS and BLS)
2. Orange County Sheriff's Department (ALS and BLS)
3. U.S. Coast Guard (military medic – ocean and shore rescue)
4. Los Angeles County Fire Department (ALS and BLS through mutual aid in North Orange County)

4. Who sets the standards for EMS air rescue?

Reply:

OCEMS considers the U.S. Coast Guard National Search and Rescue Academy standards as published in the U.S. Coast Guard manual titled, *“Helicopter Rescue Techniques: Civilian Public Safety and Military Rescue Operations”*, the standard for air rescue. California Regulations, Title 22, Chapter 8 (*Prehospital EMS Aircraft Regulations*) provide legal standards for EMS air rescue operations.

5. How is the need for an EMS air rescue response determined and coordinated?

Reply:

This is an operational determination outside the authority of OCEMS; the decision to deploy and coordinate an air rescue mission is made by on-scene command staff. When a hoist extraction is not required, an air ambulance (currently Mercy Air) is required, by Regulations, to be dispatched to load the patient from a landing site. If Mercy Air is not available for an emergency air ambulance transport or cannot land at a site, an available air rescue unit can be considered to expedite moving a patient to hospital care.

6. How is it determined which EMS air rescue unit will be deployed for an air rescue mission?

Reply:

This again is an operational determination outside the authority of OCEMS and a decision made by on-scene command staff. OCEMS is responsible for medical oversight and EMS system integration of air rescue units operating within the OCEMS jurisdiction.

