

Redlands Airport's Role

Helicopter Base for Crews Fighting the Line Fire

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The Line fire started late in the afternoon of Thursday, September 5th. The first incident report from Cal Fire said it started at Baseline and Alpine in Highland. It was first reported as a 10-acre brushfire. As of 9-11 @ 5 PM, the Line Fire was only 14% contained. Over the last 6 days, the fire grew to more than 35,000 acres. The CalFire incident report declared over 65,000 structures are threatened. Local news reported one home had been destroyed. More than 10,000 people evacuated from areas affected by this fire. An arrest has been announced of someone suspected of starting the fire.

Heavy lift water-dropping helicopters are a huge tool used to fight this fire.

Initially, they were the only aircraft being deployed. We suspect their ability to concentrate a water drop on a specific area, the steep terrain, smoke, and high temperatures has some bearing on their use.

Three helicopter crews showed up at REI to fight the fire on the evening of 9-6, and the aerial fight began. Some 22 helicopters, support vehicles, a mobile command center, and several specialty support personnel are currently staged at REI to fight the fire.

These helicopters include contract firefighting crews from all over the US and four UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters and crews from the California National Guard. There is so much equipment, all of it cannot just be staged on REI's large west ramp. There are at least 4 Chinooks and fuel trucks staged on the east end of REI's runway 26, and additional heavy lift helicopters staged on the west end of runway 8.

The amount of equipment and activity is impactful to REI's normal operations. As a result, on Sunday 9-6, Redlands airport supervisor Adarian Lawson closed the airport to all traffic except emergency aircraft. On Monday, the TFR for the Line Fire was expanded to include REI keeping REI closed. The TFR also restricted access to SBD runway 24. Here is a link to some photos taken by members of the Redlands Airport Association showing equipment staged at the airport: [REI Supports Aerial Crews Fighting The Line Fire - Google Photos](#)

Redlands has been used as a firebase for firefighting helicopters on many occasions over the years. REI's large west ramp at REI provides a large area to

stage and operate large helicopters. Helicopter operators like the flat open space of this ramp as rotor downwash from these large helicopters can damage property.

Most heavy-lift helicopters have limited range. A S-64 Sky Crane helicopter burns about 500 gallons per hour of jet fuel. It has an endurance of only slightly more than 2 hours.

The airport's proximity to the national forest and communities in the local mountains is also a factor as to why it is frequently chosen as a base for firefighting helicopters.

Redlands Airport again has proven that it is a crucially important asset to the surrounding communities for wildfire response.

JOB WELL DONE!