

Streamlining the Process: Requesting Waivers to Operate Aircraft in Flight Restricted Zones

The Challenge

A major challenge in planning and preparing aerial pesticide application projects and emergency fire retardant delivery is timing. Timing of the pest's biology, shelf life of the pesticides, immediate response required by wildland fire, preparedness of aircraft, and the airspace clearances for aerial applications all affect the planning process.

The system formerly used to request waivers to operate in Flight Restricted Zones (FRZs) from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Transportation Security Agency (TSA) required U.S. Forest Service (USFS) units to submit requests 2 to 3 months before starting aerial operations. FRZs needing waivers include Ronald Reagan National Airport, Andrews Air Force Base, Davison Army Air Field, and other areas nationwide: military operation areas, power generating plants, national memorial locations, and the Camp David Presidential Retreat. Because of such variables as climate, precipitation, and pest and leaf growth, the beginning of the project was often less than 2 months away.

The Solution

Accommodating these variables required an interagency effort. If the time to process waivers could be reduced to 2 to 3 weeks, operations would be more flexible and effective. The Northeastern Area (NA), working together with the TSA and FAA, developed a plan that reduced processing time and automated waiver requests by using the TSA website. Project managers submit their requests directly to TSA, reducing turnaround time and improving communications. If the TSA needs additional information, the project manager can provide it quickly using this direct line of communication.



Streamlining the waiver process is critical to mission efficiency and success for aircraft like this Bell Cobra (209) aerial command and control helicopter, owned and operated by the Forest Service. (Photo credit: Rick Pisio)

Resulting Benefits

The streamlined process results in less processing and waiting time, quicker turnaround time of waivers, increased pesticide effectiveness, and more flexibility in planning. The agencies also worked closely to ensure aircraft security during operations within FRZs. Required paperwork is now fully synchronized with the variables of aerial pesticide application projects. If more information or questions are needed by TSA, there is a now direct line of communication between the requesting agent and the approving authority. The variables remain, but the process is more flexible to meet the needs on the ground. Communications are improved, with more people understanding the critical timeframes of these forest health and land management projects.

Sharing Success

With many projects involved in the seasonal application of pesticides, success is shared widely. States planning projects requiring federal oversight due to funding and application procedures, federal agencies involved in aerial operations, and the general public enjoying healthy forests all benefit from the streamlined process.

Streamlining the airspace waiver process has benefited federal, state, and local governments as well as the general public.



USDA Forest Service
Northeastern Area
State and Private Forestry

For more information, contact:
Kathryn P. Maloney, Area Director
11 Campus Blvd., Suite 200
Newtown Square, PA 19073
Phone: 610-557-4103
Email: kmaloney@fs.fed.us

Billy Terry, Assistant Director
11 Campus Blvd., Suite 200
Newtown Square, PA 19073
Phone: 610-557-4145
Email: bterry@fs.fed.us