

# CAL FIRE NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



## Sonoma Lake Napa Unit

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### **Two Type 1 Helitankers will be based within LNU**

**St Helena** – CAL FIRE Sonoma-Lake-Napa Unit (LNU), welcomed two additional Type-1 Helitankers to the Unit on July 1, 2022. CAL FIRE has positioned two contracted Type-1 Helitankers used as exclusive use for aerial firefighting operations in the Sonoma Lake Napa Unit. Helitanker 1CH from Columbia Helicopters will be based out of Napa County Airport, and Helitanker 37S from Siller Brothers will be base out of Sonoma Air Attack base at the Sonoma County Airport. In addition to the Unit's own Type-1 CAL FIRE HAWK "Copter 104" based in Lake County, the region will now have three large helicopters not only arriving quicker to any new fire but can send local aircraft to multiple fires occurring at the same time. These aircraft will be available for fire assignments in the greater Bay Area and all of California.

As rapid fires spread and concurrent wildfires will continue to be the norm, and areas throughout the state previously thought to be immune to large and damaging fires are proving to be as vulnerable as areas with active fire histories. The entire state is at greater risk of major fires than at any other time in recorded history, including the redwood coastal belts and the more temperate areas of Northern California, as evidenced by the 2020 San Mateo and Santa Cruz Unit Lightning Complex, which burned over 86,000 acres and destroyed 1,490 structures along the coast range of Santa Cruz and San Mateo counties. Additional surge equipment will be required to enhance CAL FIRE's ability to meet the increasing operational deficiencies created by a changing climate, meet demands caused by a year-round fire regime, and provide a deeper pool of available equipment.

In addition to CAL FIRE staffed helicopters, the Department relies on exclusive use (EU) contracted or "call when needed" helicopters to increase its aviation response. Contracts which are based on a call when needed premise do not guarantee the availability of a helicopter when the Department calls, and these arrangements are usually implemented when a large fire is ongoing and not for initial attack response. CAL FIRE has experienced the reliability and dependability of EU contracts in that they provide greater efficiencies in getting helicopters to the initial attack stage of fires.

Helitanker 1CH, a Boeing CH-47D Chinook, is owned and operated by Columbia Helicopters of Aurora, Oregon. Helitanker 1CH arrived at the Napa County Airport and has been on contract since June 16, 2022. This helitanker holds up to 2,800 gallons of water on a fixed tank, which is permanently attached to the aircraft. The fixed tank system also provides a safer operation since they do not have a bucket hanging underneath the helicopter while in flight.

Helitanker 37S, a Sikorsky S-64E Skycrane, is owned and since July 1, 2022. This helitanker holds up to 2,000 gallons of water on a fixed tank. Siller Brothers states "the S-64E helicopter features three experienced pilots – a command pilot, copilot and aft seat pilot, whose job is to guarantee precision on every job."

These respective 2800 and 2000 gallon water droppers will enhance CAL FIRE's operations, ensuring that these mission critical resources are always available to respond to emergency fire events and operate safely in the field. They will be additional firefighting resources that will help to address complex initial attack and large fire support operations. This will not only increase our initial attack strength dramatically but will also reduce the time in getting these valuable resources to our large fires as well. The state also has on exclusive use contract this year, 3 large airtankers with 3000 and 4000 gallon capacity as well as those normally available from our partnership with the USFS. These will be used in supporting roles behind our CAL FIRE copters including the CAL FIRE HAWK out of Boggs Mountain and our CAL FIRE air tankers out of Sonoma, Ukiah, Sacramento and Chico as our closest bases. CAL FIRE LNU welcomes both Helitanker 1CH and 37S to the Unit and we look forward to working with both helitankers this year.

To learn more about CAL FIRE's Aviation Fleet visit  
<https://www.fire.ca.gov/programs/fire-protection/aviation-program/>

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