Orange County Fire Authority
NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEW HIGH TECH WILDFIRE TOOL LAUNCHED AND FLYING SUCCESSFUL MISSIONS

Provides Enhanced Situational Awareness in Minutes to Protect Lives and Property

B-roll of plane in flight and system working
https://vimeo.com/360884016

Los Alamitos, CA – September 23, 2019 – Knowing where a wildfire is, and the direction it is burning is of paramount importance to decision-makers on the ground. It is critical to saving lives and protecting property. With the new Fire Integrated Real-Time Intelligence System (FIRIS), that launched September 1, this enhanced situational awareness is now available and has already flown successful missions.

The system utilizes a fixed-wing aircraft equipped with infrared and radar sensors that can see through smoke. The plane provides real-time fire perimeter mapping and live high definition video to support a supercomputer based wildfire predictive spread modeling for first responders.

The 150-day FIRIS pilot program got off the ground thanks to funding secured in the 2019-20 state budget by Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris (D-Laguna Beach).

“The State of California must shift strategies to address the constant crisis of wildfires – this is no longer a seasonal threat,” stated Assemblywoman Petrie-Norris. “I am proud to have partnered with the Orange County Fire Authority in securing $4.5 million in state funds for technology that will protect lives and property by giving first responders better, stronger tools to use against the threat of wildfires.”

Accurate real-time perimeter mapping with frequent updates gives the size, scope, and impact of developing fires. The University of California San Diego WIFIRE wildfire spread modeling projects where and how large a wildfire will become over a 6-hour time period. The wildfire spread model will adjust for successful fire suppression actions by firefighters on the ground and in the air. This intel allows for more timely and accurate decision making for resource allocation and evacuations.

"The ability to place resources exactly where they need to be to successfully battle a wildfire can mean the difference between lives and property saved or lost", said Orange County Fire Authority Fire Chief Brian Fennessy. "Technology is becoming increasingly important as we work to suppress wildfires quickly. We're hopeful this pilot program may someday become a routine asset statewide."

For decision-makers on the ground, a common operating picture increases situational awareness. Firefighters on the front line, incident commanders, law enforcement and regional and state emergency operation centers all have the ability to see the same fire intel on a smartphone, tablet or computer in real-time. Fire perimeter maps and live video feeds are provided through an electronic network, so decision-makers truly have eyes on the fire.

"The FIRIS pilot program provides the fire service and technology communities the opportunity to collaborate on the development of tools that will help incident commanders make critical life and death decisions within minutes of arriving on-scene of a wildfire," said Los Angeles City Fire Chief Ralph Terrazas. "These capabilities are available today. However, without the support and vision of Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris and Fire Chief Brian Fennessy, the opportunity to develop technologies to meet the needs of the modern fire service would not have been possible. I am extremely appreciative of their leadership and partnership."

The pilot program is being managed by OCFA and available in Orange, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Diego and Ventura counties. The turboprop aircraft is dispatched at the first report of smoke. It has successfully flown missions over the recent Murrieta Tenaja Fire and the Ortega and Fossil Fires in Orange County.

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(Please see Fact Sheet for additional details)