Northwest Regional Aviation Responds to Disaster in Washington State

Thursday, April 3, 2014

Helicopters were used extensively during the first few hours of the deadly landslide in Oso, Washington on March 22, 2014. Snohomish County Sheriff’s Bell UH-1H “SnoHawk 10” was first on scene shortly after the slide occurred and immediately began life saving rescue operations. U.S. Naval Station Whidbey Island dispatched their Sikorsky HH-60 Jayhawk along with Navy firefighters who assisted in freeing people trapped in the massive debris piles. Fourteen people were rescued by the two hoist equipped rescue helicopters and most were transferred directly to one of three Eurocopter EC-145’s operated by Airlift Northwest, the helicopter medical service provider in the region. Snohomish County Sheriff’s Hughes 500 “SnoHawk 1” conducted both visual and thermal search of the area looking for any additional survivors while the Washington State Patrol conducted “high bird” airspace de-confliction duties and also conducted thermal searches. All survivors were rescued within the first three hours of the landslide occurring.

The rapid, coordinated response was due in large part to the joint operations and training conducted over the past 10 years by Northwest Regional Aviation (NWRA). This coalition of government operated aircraft in the state of Washington conducts joint multi-agency training and operations on a regular basis. Members include the Sheriff’s aircraft from Snohomish, King, Chelan and Spokane Counties along with Washington State Patrol. Federal and military agencies also take part in the joint training events including the U.S. Navy Whidbey SAR, U.S. Coast Guard, Washington Army National Guard, U.S. Customs Border Protection and the FBI. Lead Fire agencies in the region are also members of NWRA including Seattle Fire, Central Pierce Fire & Rescue and Snohomish County Fire District 26. Nearly every member of NWRA has contributed aircraft or personnel to this large scale disaster that continues on with the mission of victim recovery.

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