
CDF NEWS RELEASE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



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CDF Airtankers Test Dropping New Colored Retardants

Sacramento - Firefighters in California will be seeing different colored fire retardant-like substances being dropped from California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) air tankers this year.

The new products, Class A fire retardant gels, have been used in CDF airtankers operating from bases at Ukiah and Hollister since mid-June. Starting in mid-August and continuing through the end of the 2005 fire season, CDF air tankers operating from Grass Valley, Columbia, and Hemet Air Attack Bases will also be using the gel products. However, they will be able to switch back to the old red-colored, long-term fire retardant as necessary, depending on the burning conditions or the agency having jurisdictional responsibility for the fire.

The gels will have different colors -- for evaluation purposes -- than the standard red-colored, long-term fire retardant. The different brands of gel may also have different colors. The gels are approved by the US Forest Service for most applications, but are still awaiting approval for use with federal air tankers on Forest Service-administered lands. The gels meet National Fire Protection Association Standard 1150, are non-toxic, and decompose naturally when exposed to sunlight. The gels, like regular retardant, can be slippery, and the normal footing safety precautions are applicable. Gels can be cleaned off surfaces with a stream of water. The colorants are food dyes that fade completely in just a few days with exposure to sunlight.

CDF began its evaluation of water-enhancing gels at Hemet-Ryan Air Attack Base in Riverside County in 2003. In 2004 the evaluation was expanded to include Hemet-Ryan, Ukiah and Hollister Air Attack Bases. This year, Grass Valley and Columbia Air Attack Bases were added to the evaluation, for a total of five bases statewide. CDF will continue to evaluate and monitor the application and effectiveness of the gels.

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