



# PALMER AIR TANKER BASE OPERATIONS COVID-19 PROTOCOLS

## Introduction:

The Mat-Su Area COVID-19 Mitigation Plan provides protocols that have mitigations that apply to the Palmer Air Tanker Base (PATB) facilities and daily operations. In addition, these specific recommendations are to be instituted to reduce the risk of exposure to a limited number of trained and qualified airtanker flight crews, AME's, mechanics, air attack officers and base staff.

- **Alaska Health and Social Services (DHSS)** is the standard regarding COVID-19 mandates and direction in Alaska. Their recommendations and protocols are available at:
  - Alaska COVID-19 Information (Symptoms, Restrictions, Prevention, etc.)  
<http://www.coronavirus.alaska.gov>

The following are additional protocols to be followed for all staff when working at Division of Forestry airtanker bases and with airtanker groups during the fire season:

## Palmer Air Tanker Base Access:

The PATB gates should always remained closed. Access to essential staff is only allowed. This includes:

- Airtanker and Birddog/lead plane/air attack air crews.
- Check riders (trainees) and trainers.
- Airtanker company AMEs/mechanics.
- Air Attack Officers.
- Airtanker base managers and retardant support staff.
- Airtanker base and equipment maintenance staff.
- Essential deliveries (e.g., aircraft parts, crew exchange, etc.)
- Retardant delivery services.
- Fuel delivery services.

## Non-Essential Personnel:

To reduce exposure to the airtanker groups and base staff, non-essential staff will not be permitted on the bases, defined as:

- Friends and family,
- Tour groups,
- Non-essential deliveries,
- Non-essential personnel.

## **Airtanker Base Protocols:**

- Cleaning of airtanker bases will be done frequently (several times/day), and follow the recommended Alaska Health guidelines with contractor guidance:
  - <http://www.coronavirus.alaska.gov>
- Facilities cleaning procedures are to be increased on high traffic surfaces whenever the risk of outside contamination exists with emphasis on,
  - Door handles, washrooms, food preparation/cooking areas
  - Common areas
  - Gate locks and keypads
  - Fuel valves, nozzles, doors
  - Retardant valves and pump control surfaces
- Handwash stations and products will be available at all entries to the airtanker base, and all staff will wash their hands when arriving and leaving the base.
- Deliveries from outside the base (fuel slips, retardant invoices, food, water, etc.), will be minimized, and only be exchanged at the base gate. Staff will wash hands and sanitize surfaces after the deliveries.
- 6' social distancing guidelines will be practiced at all times except for maintenance crews working cooperatively on aircraft.
- All aircrews and base personnel are expected to wear face masks, maintain social distancing, and minimize contact with the public (have groceries delivered instead of in person shopping, etc.). All COVID-19 protocols must be briefed and followed.

## **Briefings:**

- Adjusting the daily airtanker alerts should be considered to allow for increase social distancing and reduce exposure. The DOF Operations Forester and Aviation Program Manager will be responsible for this decision.
- Briefings (tactical, statewide preposition, daily weather, FMO, etc.) should be conducted remotely via conference call or webinar whenever possible.
- Extra care should be taken with new personnel arriving at the base (air crew exchanges, returning from days off, etc.).
- When staff (including flight crews, AAO's, etc.) are not required to be on the base (e.g., Blue alerts), they will remain off the PATB to reduce the exposure risk.

## **Aircraft Procedures:**

- Only essential flights will be conducted, and personnel will be limited to essential crew and passengers only as determined by pilot and/or Aviation Manager.
- Prior to boarding, If the pilot or any passengers exhibit the following symptoms, remove the passenger, or do not conduct the flight:
  - A recorded fever of 38 °C / 100.4 °F (or greater), or they have experienced symptoms in the past 24 hours that could represent fever, such as unexplained chills.
  - A condition causing an employee to have episodes of sneezing, or nose blowing not controlled by simple over the counter medication or patient's own prescription.
  - Sore throat associated with fever.

- An uncontrolled cough such that the employee is likely to cough when among colleagues or a cough lasting more than two weeks and not under the care of a health care professional.
- New onset or ongoing common cold or Influenza-like illness (such as fever and cough, or shortness of breath).
- Any diarrhea associated with an acute illness.
- Body aches and pains of a presumed infectious cause.
- Sanitize hands before aircraft entry and exit. Avoid touching your face for the duration of the flight.
- Door handles, seatbelts, headsets, and any other touch points should be sanitized before and after the flight. Confirm by the pilot that the aircraft has been sanitized prior to use.
- Personnel should bring their own headset whenever possible rather than the equipment on board the aircraft.
- When using an aircraft's headset, confirm with the pilot that it has been sanitized appropriately.
- Personnel must follow any other additional hygiene procedures the pilot requests during the pre-flight briefing.

**Accommodations and Other High Exposure Areas:**

- Essential personnel (flight crews, AAO's, AME's, Aircraft Mechanics, Base Staff) should limit their exposure to other people when outside of the base.
- Large group gatherings (e.g., farmers markets, restaurants, recreation areas, etc.) and high traffic public areas should be avoided).
- Only businesses (accommodations, eating areas, grocery stores, etc.) with strict COVID-19 procedures should be avoided.
- Social distancing and sanitation protocols will be in place.
- If personnel are exhibiting any COVID-19 symptoms, they will self isolate immediately, notify the group air attack officer and their supervisor, and initiate contact tracing.