Appendix D – Equipment and Procedures Development and Evaluation Responsibilities

I. New Equipment and Procedures Proposal Process

The ROS evaluates new proposals for helicopter rappel equipment and procedures, and makes the initial recommendation to the NRWT as to whether a given proposal merits a formal evaluation.

New proposals for improved helicopter rappel equipment or procedures usually come from field users or equipment specialists. If a proposal is judged by the ROS to be worthy of a formal evaluation, the ROS chairperson will notify the NRWT chairperson in writing. The NRWT shall then consider the proposal based upon the ROS’s recommendations and merit. If the NRWT concurs with the ROS recommendation, the NRWT chairperson will contact the appropriate Technical Specialist to develop a plan for a technical evaluation of the proposed equipment or procedure. In the case of new equipment, the MTDC Rappel Project Leader is the primary point-of-contact for development and evaluation.

New proposals for equipment or procedures shall be documented using Form C-10, Equipment and Procedure Proposal Form, found in Appendix C and submitted to an individual’s ROS representative for consideration.

II. Development and Evaluation Process Responsibilities

A. National Rappel Working Team

The USDA Forest Service National Rappel Working Team (NRWT) is responsible for oversight, direction, and approval of all Forest Service helicopter rappel and cargo letdown equipment, procedures, training, and operations. The NRWT voting membership is comprised of the Regional Helicopter Operations Specialist (RHOS), or their designee, from Forest Service regions 1 through 6, and the National Helicopter Rappel Specialist.

To ensure that NRWT decisions on helicopter rappel equipment, cargo letdown equipment, or procedures reflect applicable technical and safety standards, the Rappel Project Leader from the Missoula Technology and Development Center (MTDC) shall be invited as needed to participate in any NRWT meetings, conference calls, and communications as a non-voting member and technical advisor.

To ensure that the NRWT gives sufficient consideration to operational issues related to existing or proposed helicopter rappel equipment and procedures, the NRWT has delegated specific responsibilities to a standing task group, the Rappel Operations Subcommittee (ROS).
B. **Rappel Operations Subcommittee**

The primary responsibility of the ROS is to provide the NRWT with sound and timely advice on all issues related to helicopter rappel equipment and procedures.

The ROS voting membership is made up of current designated rappel check spotters or regional rappel specialists, from Forest Service regions 1 through 6. To ensure that ROS recommendations for revisions to helicopter rappel equipment or procedures reflect applicable technical and safety standards, the MTDC Rappel Project Leader participates as needed in ROS evaluations, meetings, conference calls, and communications as a non-voting member and technical advisor.

The ROS is authorized by the NRWT to perform evaluations of any issue related to helicopter rappel equipment and procedures as long as the evaluation does not require personnel to be exposed to helicopter-related hazards or fall hazards.

The ROS will assign one member to lead each evaluation and report the results in writing back to the other ROS members. In some cases, the MTDC Rappel Project Leader may be assigned to lead such evaluations. The ROS chairperson is responsible for reporting the results of each ROS evaluation in a formal electronic letter under the ROS letterhead, to the chairperson of the NRWT.

After receiving such input from the ROS, the NRWT chairperson is responsible for disseminating the information to other NRWT members for review and for tracking the progress of the issue until it is either tabled or resolved. The NRWT is responsible for making the final determination on any issue that might result in an alteration of current helicopter rappel equipment and procedures. When an evaluation cannot be accomplished without exposing personnel to helicopter related or fall hazards, the ROS must be specifically and formally authorized to perform the evaluation by the NRWT. The authorization for conducting potentially hazardous evaluations will be in the form of a formal electronic letter under the NRWT letterhead sent from the NRWT chairperson to the ROS chairperson.

Once an authorization for conducting a potentially hazardous evaluation is received, the ROS chairperson will convene a meeting or conference call with all ROS members to determine who will be responsible for leading and conducting the evaluation, and to develop an action plan and schedule. In addition to the other responsibilities as outlined above, the person assigned to lead the evaluation will develop a Job Hazard Analysis, have it approved by an MTDC Line Officer, and brief all participants on the identified hazards prior to the evaluation.
C. Technical Specialists

Equipment and procedure development or evaluations generally rely upon collaboration with a number of specialists who have technical expertise related to the concern or initiative. Technical specialists include, but are not limited to, the MTDC Rappel Project Leader, National Aeronautical Engineer, National Helicopter Inspector Pilot/Program Manager, and National Aviation Maintenance Inspector.

Because MTDC has a designated role in the USDA Forest Service Washington Office Engineering Program to evaluate, design, and test equipment used in Forest Service fire and aviation operations, the MTDC Rappel Project Leader will often be the primary technical specialist and lead on most Forest Service helicopter rappel equipment endeavors.

The chairperson of the NRWT is responsible for keeping the MTDC Rappel Project Leader or appropriate Technical Specialist informed on issues related to rappel equipment and procedures, and for negotiating the assignment of new tasks that may impact the Project Leader’s or Technical Specialist’s program of work.

When the NRWT identifies a need for new or improved helicopter rappel equipment, the chairperson of the NRWT will notify the MTDC Rappel Project Leader or appropriate Technical Specialist. Upon receiving said notification, the Rappel Project Leader or Technical Specialist and NRWT chairperson will jointly develop a formal tasking that includes a statement of work and projected timeline for completion. Once details of the tasking have been agreed upon, the NRWT chairperson will issue a formal tasking to the Rappel Project Leader or Technical Specialist via a formal letter under NRWT letterhead.

D. MTDC Workload Prioritization

Respective of the workload for the MTDC Rappel Project Leader, the urgency and complexity of the requested task will dictate whether the task may be simply added to the MTDC Rappel Project Leader’s existing work list or if the task will require a re-prioritization of the Rappel Project Leader’s existing program of work. If an urgent need to accomplish a given task delays the accomplishment of other tasks in the Rappel Project Leader’s program of work, the projected timelines on delayed tasks must be adjusted accordingly. The NRWT will collaborate with the MTDC Rappel Project Leader in re-prioritizing workload.

If the funds required to accomplish specialty tasks are above what has been allotted for MTDC’s budget, the Project Leader will present the estimate to the NRWT chairperson. It then becomes the NRWT chairperson’s responsibility to procure funding for the specialty project.