Chapter 11
Temporary Towers and Airport Closures

I. Introduction

Airspace coordination with other users of the National Airspace System is essential. Sometimes there may be a need within the incident operation, either at uncontrolled airports or at helibases, to obtain professional air traffic control services from the FAA by ordering a Temporary Tower.

A determination of need should be evaluated by agency aviation management prior to ordering a Temporary Tower. This should be a joint decision by the Incident Management Team and the local Aviation Unit Manager. Airport managers should be consulted, as well as pilots and aircraft managers.

A risk assessment should be considered such as Chapter 3 of the Interagency Helicopter Operations Guide (IHOG). Risk assessment is part of the risk management process that can be used to analyze the necessity of ordering a Temporary Tower.

Current agreements with the FAA only provide for certified and trained Air Traffic Controllers on an as needed basis during emergencies. Controllers must be currently licensed and certified. No provisions have been implemented between the FAA and the Department of Defense for our agencies to utilize Department of Defense Air Traffic Controllers.

Private based (ie retired controllers or contractors) with contract proposals to provide air traffic control services for agency incidents should be referred to the FAA. As per the FAA, land management agencies should not contract with private individuals to provide air traffic control service. Private individuals or companies are welcome to contract with the FAA. The FAA remains our nations airspace manager and has agreed to provide us temporary tower services on an as needed emergency basis.

II. Airport Operations and Closures

Initiating Operations At An Airport: There are numerous training guides Air Support Group Supervisor) that have been developed concerning flight operations at an airport. These should be consulted when setting up airport operations. Additionally, the operation should be supervised only by qualified personnel.

Situations Necessitating An Airport Closure. The proximity of an incident to an airport, or the volume of aviation activity generated at an airport by an incident may necessitate the closure of an airport. VFR Airport traffic is allowed inside a TFR for ingress or egress (91.137 (a) 2).

THE PRESENCE OF A TFR OVER AN AIRPORT DOES NOT CLOSE THE AIRPORT.

An airport can only be closed by its "owner" which may be a private citizen, a municipality, State, etc. Airport closure is a highly sensitive issue. The request for closure should provide (spell out) a valid reason of aviation safety or other concerns. Requests to close an airport should usually be implemented by contacting the local airport authority or airport manager.

For information on airport managers, consult the Airport/Facility/Directory. Airports on agency land (ie a USFS Back Country Airstrip) should be carefully researched. In some cases, even though the airstrip is located on agency land, it might be leased to the State. In that case, the State Aeronautical Division would be considered the owner or manager and would have to be consulted for closure.

III. Determination of Need for Temporary Towers

FAA Temporary Towers should be activated when conditions are such that positive aircraft control will enhance safety. Needs may result from hazards to both participating and non-participating aircraft such as:

A. Operations are being conducted from or in proximity to an uncontrolled airport; or,

B. There is a high volume of airplanes and/or helicopter traffic anticipated in close proximity to each other; or,

C. There is a high frequency of non-incident aircraft using common airspace; or,

D. Special events are being conducted adjacent to the incident or at the airport where incident aircraft are operating; or,

E. Visibility conditions are such that flight operations would be enhanced through use of certified controllers.

F. Risk assessment of involved airspace indicates the need for Air Traffic Control.

IV. Tower Ordering/Set-Up Process

A. Dispatch submits a resource order through their appropriate channels for an FAA Tower as an "A" (Aircraft) request, identifying date and time, location and times of operation (ie sunrise to sunset).

B. The FAA will be responsible for staffing appropriately to meet the request and handle any internal requirements. They will rotate controllers as determined by their schedule and union requirements.

C. The local unit aviation manager is responsible for providing a thorough briefing to the FAA controllers and allow the controllers to present a briefing to pilots and other interested personnel. See the Briefing included in this Chapter.

D. If an Incident Management Team is in place, the Incident Air Operations Branch Director should include a briefing on the tower facility in its Air Operations Plan.

E. Ensure adequate radio kit(s) are available for use. These must be 720- channel VHF-AM radios, VHF-FM radios as needed. (Note that some Helibase or Airbase Operations trailers come with complete radio packages).

F. Request that the FAA issues a NOTAM (Notice to Airmen) for the airport/helibase informing the public of the change in status from uncontrolled to controlled airspace and identifying the radio frequency for contact with the tower. Incident Unit will issue notification via appropriate means to appropriate aviation personnel (Dispatchers, helibases, airtanker bases, etc) notifying them (ie; e-mail) of Temporary Tower's frequency and hours.

G. Since the FAA does not ALWAYS have the support equipment necessary to establish a temporary tower, the incident should order support equipment through established ordering channels. Shelter from the elements should be provided for FAA personnel to reduce fatigue and improve safety conditions while they are working. Vendors offering well-equipped Helibase or Airbase Operations trailers are an option to be considered.

Figure 11-1, Page 1

Checklist for Establishment of a Temporary Tower		Page 1 of 3
Location: _____	By:_____	Date:__/__/__

Prior to Arrival of FAA Personnel

The following should be provided to FAA personnel before they travel to their assignment:

- ❑ Travel Directions. Give specific location or address of expanded dispatch for resource order check-in.
- ❑ Specific Location of Incident Command Post and airbase (fixed- and rotary-wing)
- ❑ Expanded Dispatch/Initial Attack Dispatch points of contact and phone numbers
- ❑ Points of Contact as appropriate: Local Unit Aviation Officer, Air Operations Branch Director and/or Air Support Group Supervisor, Helibase Manager
- ❑ Conditions to expect. Consider the following: Camp or hotel quarters, Weather conditions, Roads, Helibase/or Airport operation and Meals

Upon Arrival of FAA Personnel:

Upon FAA's arrival at assignment, provide the following general knowledge for assignment:

- ❑ Check-in protocol
- ❑ Lodging arrangements (how to get a hotel room), or how to obtain a sleeping bag, tent, etc. (Minimize primitive conditions to mitigate fatigue for controllers. This is a safety and controller union issue.)
- ❑ How the controllers are to order supplies for the tower, eating arrangements, etc. (ie, through ASGS)
- ❑ Introduction to basic ICS, chain of command and flow structure: expanded dispatch and initial attack dispatch, unit aviation officer, air operations branch director, air support group supervisor, air tactical group supervisor, helibase manager, air tanker base manager
- ❑ Unit and incident(s)'communications plans, shift plans
- ❑ Demobilization or rotation protocol (FAA home unit and union rules will determine FAA personnel rotation)
- ❑ Transportation upon arrival, during assignment, rotation out, and demobilization
- ❑ Terminology (e.g., "What is a probeye? What is a ping pong ball machine? What is a fire shelter?)"

Figure 11-1, Page 2

Checklist for Establishment of a Temporary Tower		Page 2 of 3
Location: _____	By: _____	Date: __/__/__

Start-up Procedure:
Before tower is operational, air operations should:

❑ Provide FAA controllers personnel with a familiarization flight of the local area to help them understand the local area as pilots see it. Scope of this flight will vary depending upon whether controller are being used as tower control or area-wide flight following. Visit all aircraft operating facilities (helibase and fixed-wing bases) if possible. It is very advantageous to have the air tactical group supervisor conduct this flight.

Upon completion of the flight, a briefing should be held between the tower operators, the air operations branch director, the air tactical group supervisor, the air support group supervisor, the helibase manager and/or air tanker base manager, the fixed base operator, incident pilots and any local pilots continuing to operate from the airport or helibase. At this briefing, use their expertise to discuss the following:

❑ Site Selection for towers.
- # Does a facility exist (deactivated tower, building, etc.)?
- # Could you use a rental trailer?
- # Does the facility have a good field or view for taxi, takeoff and approach?

❑ Examine existing helibase/airport procedures. If necessary, amend temporarily to meet objectives. Consider:
- # Inbound/outbound flight paths, altitudes and reporting points
- # Air traffic patterns to, from and around the incident
- # Ground taxi patterns and departure sequence for helicopters and airplanes
- # Communication procedures
- # Procedure for obtaining frequency assignments (FAA and/or ATGS)

❑ Establish tower hours (Coordinate with supervisor or controller in charge)

❑ FAA rotation and duty day limitations

❑ Ensure that the controllers do the following:
- # Issue NOTAM that tower is operational
- # Notify agencies that tower is operational
- # Establish LOA with ARTCC (if needed)

Figure 11-1, Page 3

Checklist for Establishment of a Temporary Tower		Page 3 of 3
Location: _____	By: _____	Date: __/__/__

Establish Emergency Procedures:

- ❑ Discuss fire survival (e.g., fire shelters, overrun of base or camp, etc)
- ❑ Identify distractions and eliminate noise and heat.
- ❑ Discuss:

  # Empty weight and loaded weight for runways
  # Noise abatement procedures
  # Restrictions on runways
  # Local Airport Contacts
  # Air tanker needs
  # Aircraft performance and characteristics - weight
  # Procedures if your TFR overlaps the airport or helibase
  # The role of FAA if you have an intruder within your TFR
  # Other TFR's in the area
  # Procedure for TFR modifications

Shutdown Procedures:

- ❑ Be Sure To:

  # Plan closure to tower in advance
    Note: FAA needs lead time for tower closure procedures to be put in effect
  # Close out NOTAM
  # Notify units through out agencies of tower closure
  # Close out aircraft resource order for temporary tower

V. Supply Suggestions for the Temporary Tower

A list follows of items that may be of value for tower operations.

> Check with the air operations branch director and the FAA controllers before ordering. Some items may not be necessary.

Figure 11-2

Check List for Supplies for a Temporary Tower		Page 1 of 1
Location: _____	By:	Date: __/__/__

- ☐ Anemometer
- ☐ Compass
- ☐ Binoculars
- ☐ Traffic Counter
- ☐ Wind and Alt Inst
- ☐ Temperature Instrument
- ☐ Light Gun - battery powered
- ☐ Wind Sock
- ☐ Clocks 24 hour - 1 for local, 1 for (GMT) Zulu
- ☐ Goggles (if needed)
- ☐ Writing Table
- ☐ Roof/Sun cover
- ☐ Chairs
- ☐ Basic Office Supplies (Pads, Pens, Pencils, tape, stapler, scissors, etc)
- ☐ Generator (if needed)
- ☐ Extension Cord (if needed)

- ☐ Radios - main and battery back-up (edo-air)
- ☐ VHF radios
- ☐ Telephones (cellular or regular)
- ☐ UHF Radios (military?)

- ☐ FAA 7230-10 Position Log
- ☐ FAA 7230-4 Daily Log
- ☐ ICS Unit Logs

- ☐ Bottled water/Water cooler
- ☐ Lights/Lamps
- ☐ Fans
- ☐ Flashlights
- ☐ Fire extinguisher
- ☐ Radio AM/FM

- ☐ Plotters
- ☐ Navigational Charts and Sectionals
- ☐ Forest maps
- ☐ State aeronautical chart
- ☐ Fire maps
- ☐ Airport diagram
- ☐ AFD Airport Facility Directory
- ☐ US Terminal Procedures (for approach plates)

NOTE - Consider ordering NFES 4300 FHP Ground Aircraft Base which has SOME material that could be used as an FAA portable control tower