

RCW 76.04.192 Aviation usage by local fire departments—Report to the legislature. (Expires July 1, 2027.) (1) The department shall prepare and submit, consistent with RCW 43.01.036, an appendix on aviation usage by local fire departments for initial attack as a part of its annual wildfire report to the standing committees of the legislature with jurisdiction over wildland firefighting. The department shall submit the report by December 1st of each year. The report must address, at a minimum, the following topics:

(a) The dollar value of funding utilized by local fire departments for initial attack aviation during the year;

(b) The specific local fire departments that utilized this funding during the year;

(c) The wildland fires on which suppression funding was utilized to provide local fire departments initial attack aviation resources during the year, including names, locations, and sizes of fires, and amount of funding utilized on each of the fires; and

(d) A review of lessons learned related to aviation use by local fire departments for initial attack based on the preceding fire season, along with recommendations for future improvements to the wildland fire response process based on the lessons learned.

(2) The department shall consult with the state fire defense committee, fire service representatives, and the state fire marshal's office annually to review aviation program performance and determine aviation needs for the following fire year. [2023 c 457 s 2.]

Intent—2023 c 457: "(1) Local and tribal fire departments in the state of Washington serve as frontline responders to wildland fires. The fire chief of each local fire department with jurisdiction over wildland fires is tasked with making rapid decisions, especially during the summer months when weather conditions can cause fires to rapidly enlarge. Flashy fuels, especially during times of low humidity, can be ignited by a single spark and erupt into a rapidly moving incident that can quickly destroy rangelands, ripe dryland crops, and timberlands.

(2) Local fire departments need immediate access to local aviation resources that are certified to fly and drop fire retardants and water to suppress or extinguish wildland fires quickly. The use of aviation assets has proven to be a valuable tool to prevent many wildland fires from growing large and requiring the response of state mobilization and prevent the deployment of state and federal fire agencies and their mobilization partner agencies.

(3) Further, the strategic use of aviation assets in initial attack, or at times when conditions on the ground may warrant additional air support, can prevent fires from becoming uncontrollable. Local fire departments that use aviation assets on initial attack can prevent most fires from requiring a state mobilization. Providing financial assurances for local fire departments to deploy aviation assets will provide greater protection to our state's natural resources, air quality, and communities.

(4) The legislature intends to provide suppression funding to the department of natural resources to support local fire departments in the use of aviation resources certified and trained to operate in wildland fires and drop fire retardant or water to suppress or extinguish fires as an initial attack strategy. Deployment and air operations command will be conducted at the direction of trained air operations commanders.

(5) The legislature intends to authorize the department of natural resources to provide aviation resources to local fire departments statewide for use during the initial attack of wildland fires in order to provide assurance that local fire departments will have sufficient financial capacity to effectively control wildland fires throughout the length of the fire season. Having assurance that local fire departments can afford to use aircraft under conditions that would warrant their use and at the discretion of the local fire department chief will incentivize the use of aircraft more quickly in order to rapidly suppress the fire and minimize damage to lands, resources, and structures, while protecting regional air quality."
[2023 c 457 s 1.]

Expiration date—2023 c 457: "This act expires July 1, 2027."
[2023 c 457 s 5.]