

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6471

As of January 23, 2020

Title: An act relating to establishing an air operations branch.

Brief Description: Establishing an air operations branch.

Sponsors: Senators Randall, King, Honeyford, Liias, Hasegawa and Wilson, C.; by request of Department of Transportation.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 1/27/20.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Aviation Division of the Department of Transportation as the state's Air Operations Branch.
- Assigns the Air Operations Branch to perform aviation emergency responses, in the case of a Governor declaration of emergency, as part of the state Military Department's emergency operations center response.
- Requires the Air Operations Branch director to report to the state's Emergency Operations Center once activated.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Staff: Daniel Masterson (786-7454)

Background: The Emergency Management Division (EMD) of the Washington Military Department administers emergency management and disaster relief programs. The EMD operates the emergency operations center and is responsible for carrying out all emergency management functions to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies and disasters.

When necessary to respond to a Governor proclaimed state of emergency, EMD uses an incident command system to manage multiagency/multi-jurisdiction operations. An incident command system is either:

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- an all-hazards, on-scene functional management system that establishes common standards in organization, terminology, and procedures; provides a means—unified command—for the establishment of a common set of incident objectives and strategies during multiagency/multi-jurisdiction operations while maintaining individual agency/jurisdiction authority, responsibility, and accountability; and is a component of the national interagency incident management system; or
- an equivalent and compatible all-hazards, on-scene functional management system.

The Aviation Division of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is responsible for all aerial search and rescue activities within the state. Aerial search and rescue activities includes search and rescue efforts involving aircraft and airships.

Summary of Bill: The Aviation Division shall plan, train, and function as the Air Operations Branch. An Air Operations Branch is defined as an organization created in accordance with the incident command system to perform aviation emergency response. The Aviation Division director, or a designee, shall act as the Air Operations Branch director.

In the case of a Governor declaration of emergency, the Aviation Division executes the Air Operations Branch responsibility as part of the state Military Department's Emergency Operations Center response. The air operations branch director reports to the state's Emergency Operations Center once activated.

As the senior state aviation official, the duties of the Air Operations Branch director include:

- prioritizing deployment and employment of air assets available to the state in accordance with the priorities of the director of the EMD of the state Military Department;
- assessing the ongoing needs and capabilities of aviation emergency response within the state to include both manned and unmanned aircraft;
- training and composition of the Air Operations Branch staff and other associated aviation support personnel in accordance with the incident command system;
- coordinating with state and federal agencies expected to contribute to staffing the Air Operations Branch;
- identifying, assessing, and assisting airfields likely to support an aviation response;
- coordinating a public outreach program;
- maintaining operational control over air and support assets for the incident or coordinating the employment and support for air operation resources;
- requesting additional aviation resources, as required, through the EMD of the state Military Department; and
- undertaking other aviation emergency response coordination duties deemed appropriate by the director of the EMD and the Air Operations Branch director.

Responsibility for all aerial search and rescue activities within the state is placed with the whole WSDOT, not solely the aviation division.

Definitions are added statute for the following terms: air operations branch, air operations branch director, aviation division, and unmanned aircraft.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 21, 2020.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.