

Appendix D – Equipment and Procedures Development and Evaluation Responsibilities

I. New Equipment and Procedures Proposal Process

The Rappel Training Subcommittee (RTS) evaluates new proposals for helicopter rappel equipment and procedures, and makes the initial recommendation to the National Rappel Working Team (NRWT) as to whether a given proposal merits a formal evaluation.

New proposals for improved helicopter rappel equipment or procedures may come from field users and should be passed to the RTS through the individual's Rappel Operations Subcommittee (ROS) representative. If a proposal is judged by the RTS to be worthy of a formal evaluation, the RTS chairperson will notify the NRWT chairperson and submit a formal proposal. The NRWT shall then consider the proposal based upon the RTS's recommendations. If the NRWT concurs with the RTS 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 National Technology and Development Program (NTDP) rappel equipment specialist 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. Based on the significance of the changes, revision of the NROG may be warranted.

II. Development and Evaluation Process Responsibilities

A. National Rappel Working Team

The NRWT is responsible for oversight, direction and approval of all Forest Service helicopter rappel and cargo letdown equipment, procedures, training and operations.

To ensure that the NRWT decisions on helicopter rappel equipment, cargo letdown equipment, or procedures reflect applicable technical and safety standards, the rappel equipment specialist from NTDP may 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 proposed helicopter rappel equipment and procedures, it may be necessary to involve the ROS as an advisory group.

B. Rappel Training Subcommittee (RTS)

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

To ensure that the RTS recommendations for revisions to helicopter rappel equipment and or procedures reflects applicable technical and safety standards, the NTDP rappel equipment specialist may participate as needed in RTS meetings, conference calls, and communications as a technical advisor.

The RTS 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 RTS will assign one member to lead each evaluation and report the results in writing back to the other RTS members. In some cases, the NTDP rappel equipment specialist may be assigned to lead such evaluations. The RTS chairperson is responsible for reporting the results of each evaluation to the chairperson of the NRWT. After receiving such input from the RTS, the NRWT chairperson is responsible for disseminating the information to other NRWT members for review and for tracking the progress of the proposed change. 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 RTS 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 RTS chairperson. Once an authorization for conducting a potentially hazardous evaluation is received, the RTS chairperson will convene a meeting or conference call with all RTS 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.

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 NTDP rappel equipment specialist, national aeronautical engineer, national helicopter inspector pilot/program manager, and national aviation maintenance inspector.

Because NTDP 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 NTDP rappel equipment specialist 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 NTDP rappel project leader or appropriate technical specialist(s) informed on issues related to rappel equipment and procedures, and for negotiating the assignment of new tasks that may impact the 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 NTDP rappel equipment specialist or appropriate technical specialist. Upon receiving said notification, the rappel equipment specialist or other technical specialist(s) 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 via a letter under NRWT letterhead.

D. Workload Prioritization

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

If the funds required to accomplish specialty tasks are above what has been allotted to in the rappel budget, the technical specialist will present the estimate to the NRWT chairperson. It then becomes the NRWT chairperson's responsibility to procure funding for the specialty project.