

# New Ventura County helicopter will be ready for fire season

[Steve Byerly](#), Ventura County Star

A new specialized firefighting helicopter will be ready for action during Ventura County's next wildfire season, officials said Friday.

The 2007 Sikorsky UH-60L Black Hawk — converted from military use into what's called a Firehawk — was put to the test Wednesday. Crews for the first time dropped 600 gallons of water from it with a collapsible hanging container that's typically filled from lakes and ponds.

The aircraft, dubbed Copter 2, [arrived in August at the Ventura County Air Unit](#) in Camarillo.

The helicopter and two more like it were purchased by the county in 2018 for \$7.4 million, but delays in the refitting process kept them from being ready for the recent fire season.

**Heroes:** [Fallen Oxnard police officer remembered with tears, laughter](#)

"The company that's doing it — there are so many Firehawks out there that they're a little behind," Ventura County Fire Department Capt. Brian McGrath said Friday.



The county's next copter is expected to arrive in August. Two of the three will be part of the county fleet, while one will be used for spare parts.

McGrath said Copter 2 is operational, but the pilots are still putting in their required flying hours in it. He said the pilots and Copter 2 will be ready for the upcoming fire season.

Officials say the Firehawks will be far better than the older copters the county has been using for firefighting.

The older aircraft, Copter 7 and Copter 8, are 1969 Bell UH-1 Iroquois "Hueys" that can fly at 80 to 100 mph and carry up to 350 gallons of water. The Firehawks can reach 165 mph and carry 1,100 gallons of water.

"We're looking forward to using these in the future and serving the public in an even higher capacity," McGrath told The Star.