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**HOW TO IMPROVE COORDINATION  
WITH HELICOPTER UNITS**

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# HOW TO IMPROVE COORDINATION WITH HELICOPTER UNITS

*Use these suggestions to get more effective air support*



*As a tactical flight officer, Pasadena (Calif.) PD's Brad May handles the police work, while pilot Sgt. Mike Ingram flies the chopper. Photo by Paul Clinton.*

The Pasadena (Calif.) PD's airborne law enforcement unit based in the hills of Altadena manages a fleet of six helicopters that support the city's black-and-whites, the regional Foothill Air Support Team (FAST) for 10 other San Gabriel Valley cities, as well as L.A. Impact, a regional narcotics task force.

As such, the officers in the unit have developed the skills necessary to effectively coordinate with patrol officers, dispatchers and ground operations in multiple jurisdictions.

Pasadena PD's Sgt. Mike Ingram, the unit's lead pilot, and Brad May, a tactical flight officer, spoke to POLICE Magazine about this working relationship and gave the copter's eye view for ground units.

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Exclusively for the readers of POLICE Magazine, Ingram and May provide nine pointers for any law enforcement ground unit who coordinates with airborne units. They will improve your working relationship with the sky patrol during pursuits, surveillance or other joint missions.

Courtesy of these airborne officers, here are the pointers:

1) Know your patrol car number. Unless you're assigned a designated unit, you may be driving a different car each shift. Be sure to note the numbers on the car's roof, so you can relay those over your radio, when asking for assistance from the airborne unit.

2) Don't ask, "See me right here?" The copter's flight tactical officer needs more descriptive information about your location to quickly locate you. Describe the color of the nearby building. Use descriptive details about your setting and mention landmarks. Instead of saying you're parked in front of a house, say you're parked in front of a red house with a brown door and detached garage. The more descriptive details, the better.

3) When you're relaying information about descriptions of suspects, keep the helicopter in mind. Describing a suspect as a Latino with brown eyes in his 40s doesn't help an officer 700 feet above you. Mention if he's wearing a white shirt, baseball cap, sports jersey or backpack.

4) Detailed descriptors should also be used when you're describing vehicles. Mention if the vehicle is two-tone in color. Relay discernible features such as roof racks or extended-cab configurations. With vehicles, don't forget to include TC (traffic collision) information about where visible damage occurred.

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5) When requesting air support, consider weather issues. Because helicopters don't have an instrument-flight mode, flying in overcast or foggy conditions can lead to poor visibility and loss of control of the craft. Helicopters can fly in the rain, if needed; however, depending on the size of the rain drops, the leading edges of the rotor blades can be damaged.

6) Getting to the call from the ground may take longer than you expect. Helicopters aren't like cruisers, where you can just turn the key and go. A safe, deliberate takeoff will avoid a "hot start," where fuel and/or air is introduced into the turbine engine too quickly, causing the airship to redline.

7) If you can, provide some lead time. Incorporate the helicopter into the planning of the mission, and try not to think about it only as an afterthought.

8) When you stop subjects or vehicles, try to stop them in an open area to improve visibility from above. Try not to do your stop under trees or a freeway underpass.

9) When searching for someone, provide the location where the suspect was last seen, as well as the time delay. The airborne unit can evaluate the landscape and try to determine a likely path to search.