



MULTI-CREW COORDINATION

IN EUROPEAN HELICOPTER OPERATIONS

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Multi-crew coordination (MCC) has emerged as a vital element of operational success and safety in law enforcement aviation around the world. In Europe, police air units rely on helicopters for a broad range of missions, including surveillance, suspect pursuit, crowd monitoring, and search and rescue. These complex tasks require seamless cooperation between pilots, tactical flight officers, and ground units.

Effective MCC is essential to ensure demanding missions are executed safely, efficiently and within legal and regulatory parameters. The European model is one from which everyone in the worldwide airborne public safety community can learn.

The Role of Multi-Crew Coordination

MCC refers to the collaborative skills and structured communication methods that allow a helicopter crew to function as a cohesive unit. In law enforcement operations, this usually means a pilot and one or more tactical crew members sharing responsibilities for navigation, visual reconnaissance, communication with command centers and, sometimes, managing onboard surveillance technology.

Unlike commercial aviation, law enforcement operations often involve unpredictable, fast-evolving scenarios. In this context, MCC goes beyond traditional flight duties and includes dynamic decision making, clear delegation of tasks and mutual situational awareness—all crucial when operating at low altitudes over urban environments or during high-pressure pursuits.

Regulatory Framework & Training

In Europe, helicopter operations for police and security agencies fall under the umbrella of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) regulations, particularly in relation to operator certification and crew training. While some law enforcement

flights may be conducted under state (non-commercial) operations and not fully subject to commercial aviation rules, EASA's standards for MCC training remain highly influential across the continent.

For aircraft classified as multi-pilot under their type certificate—such as the Airbus H135, H145 and Leonardo AW169—EASA mandates MCC training as part of all crews' qualifications. The training encompasses key competencies, including crew communication, leadership, task management, error mitigation and adherence to standard operating procedures.

Police air units across Europe typically provide initial and recurrent MCC training tailored to their specific operational roles. Simulators and scenario-based training are increasingly used to replicate real-world law enforcement missions, such as nighttime urban pursuits, crowd surveillance and coordination across multiple agencies.

Tactical Crew Integration

A unique element in law enforcement helicopter operations is the presence of TFOs—sworn officers or trained observers who manage the mission-specific elements of the flight. Their roles include operating infrared





and camera systems, identifying suspects or threats and relaying information to ground units. They are as integral to mission success as the pilot.

This adds an extra layer of complexity to MCC, requiring even greater emphasis on inter-crew trust and non-technical skills. The tactical officer must understand aviation limitations, while the pilot must be aware of the tactical needs of the mission. European police aviation units have recognized this by developing joint training programs that include both pilots and flight officers in MCC scenarios.

Operational Advantages

The benefits of effective MCC are clear. Improved coordination reduces the risk of miscommunication, improves mission planning and execution, and enhances the safety of all involved—both in the air and on the ground. In volatile situations such as civil unrest, hostage scenarios or rapid vehicle pursuits, coordinated air support can be a decisive factor in achieving a safe resolution.

Effective MCC enables law enforcement helicopters to integrate smoothly with other emergency services, such as fire and rescue or border patrol units. Inter-agency collaboration often relies on well-drilled communica-

tion protocols and shared situational awareness—key components of MCC training.

Spain's Policia Nacional and Guardia Civil, which operates multiple aviation units, serves as strong examples of MCC in action. The Policia Nacional's helicopter fleet, based at key locations like Madrid-Barajas and Barcelona-El Prat, is heavily involved in border surveillance, drug interdiction and public event monitoring. Meanwhile, the Guardia Civil operates helicopters for both civil protection and criminal enforcement across Spain's rural and mountainous regions.

Both agencies use Airbus helicopters, such as the H135, which is specifically designed for multi-crew operation. Missions often involve a pilot and flight officer managing camera systems, infrared sensors and communicating in real time with ground units.



Training for the crews is highly structured. MCC principles are embedded into mission rehearsals and simulator sessions, especially for complex operations like anti-narcotics raids and monitoring major public gatherings. The integration of TFOs into the national police agency's MCC framework has proven essential in improving mission outcomes and safety margins.

Looking Forward

As law enforcement aviation continues to evolve—with growing use of drones, advanced surveillance systems and integrated command-and-control networks—the role of MCC is expanding. European police air units are investing in higher-fidelity simulation tools, cross-border joint training and standardization efforts across jurisdictions.

In European law enforcement helicopter operations, MCC is more than a regulatory requirement—it's a cornerstone of mission effectiveness and safety. By fostering a culture of teamwork, structured communication and continuous training, police aviation units are better equipped to meet the demands of modern public safety from the sky than ever before. ▀