



Santa Maria Public Airport Announces Expansion of U.S. Forest Service Air Attack Base

Santa Maria, CA. (August 11, 2020) - Santa Maria Airport (SMX) announces the first stage in the creation of an additional long-term fire retardant re-loading point, known as Pit 4, for the U.S. Forest Service Air Attack Base (Tanker Base) at the Santa Maria Airport.

“We are extremely proud to announce the expansion of the U.S. Forest Service’s tanker base firefighting facilities at SMX” said Chris Hastert, General Manager, Santa Maria Airport District. “While Pit 4 is currently comprised of new, temporary equipment, plans are in place to install a permanent fire retardant mixing/loading facility which will increase capacity, allow greater efficiency, and ensure that we can accommodate simultaneously more than one of the largest aircraft in the Forest Service fleet, the DC-10.”

Hastert added, “This additional facility would not have been possible without the support and direct involvement of Congressman Salud Carbajal and his staff.”

“Climate change has created year-round wildfire seasons, so I’m glad the Forest Service sees the growing importance of a permanent air tanker facility for Santa Maria and the entire region,” said Congressman Carbajal. “Now more than ever, it is essential that we work to increase capacity for large and very large air tankers that have proven critical in the fight against fires. I’m glad our work with the Forest Service was fruitful and were able to achieve this permanent expansion.”

First established at SMX in 2007, the air tanker base has become a critical component in fighting wildfire and protecting residents not only on the Central Coast, but also reaching out to locations as far away as Arizona, Utah and Colorado. In fact, the air tanker base in Santa Maria often dispenses more retardant per fire season than most others in the country.

“We truly appreciate the shared commitment with our partners at the Central Coast Jet Center, the Santa Maria Airport Authority, and our state and county fire departments that are doing all that they can to work together to protect our firefighters and communities,” said Los Padres National Forest Supervisor Kevin Elliott. “Having the additional retardant pit will increase our ability to support firefighters on the ground and protect communities at risk from new wildfire starts across the Central Coast.”

The **Santa Maria Public Airport** encompasses approximately 2,577 acres, including two active runways. The airport provides facilities for one airline (Allegiant), the U.S. Forest Service Tanker Base, and over 200 general aviation aircraft. United Airlines has announced new service into SMX, anticipated to begin in March 2021.

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