

FAQs – Austin Airtanker Base

What are the basic facts and figures for the airtanker base?

The airtanker base equipment has been designated for the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport is considered a portable airtanker base. It can be set up and fully operational at ABIA in 24 hours, but also affords the flexibility to be mobilized to another area of the state if needed. This is the second airtanker base purchased by Texas A&M Forest Service. The first was purchased with federal grant funding in 2014 and is currently based at the Abilene Airport.

Who will operate the base?

The base is operated by Texas A&M Forest Service personnel with the assistance of the U.S. Forest Service. In addition, some personnel from the Austin Fire Department will support Texas A&M Forest Service operations at the base.

How long does it currently take to mobilize with this base?

The Austin portable airtanker base can be set up and staffed within 24 hours. The intent of Texas A&M Forest Service is to activate the base at the beginning of a fire season in Central Texas or the surrounding area, ahead of any significant wildfire activity.

How does this base increase current capacities in times of disaster?

Having an airtanker base at ABIA will allow for faster response times and greater cost efficiency when responding to fires in Central Texas and the surrounding area.

What type of planes will the base be able to handle? What is their capacity?

The base will be equipped to handle all aircraft in the national airtanker fleet. These aircraft include C-130s, MD-87s, DC-10s, BAe-146s, P2Vs and RJ85s and range from 2,000 to 12,000-gallon capacity.

How did this airtanker base evolve?

This airtanker base is part of the Texas Wildfire Protection Plan funded by the state legislature in 2013 and was purchased in recognition of the values at risk in Central Texas. Texas A&M Forest Service, Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, the Austin Fire Department, as well as residents and local officials supported the project and state Rep. John Cyrier played a key role in bringing the parties together to make the airtanker base a reality.

What is the cost of the base?

The approximate cost for the base equipment was \$300,000. In addition, the cost of retardant that is dropped on fires is approximately \$3.00 per gallon.

During an activation, the cost of operating the base will be dependent on the number of aircraft, the staffing required and the number of hours flown. Flight costs on the current national fleet of aircraft range from \$7,300 to \$13,500 per hour and 'standby' rates may run from \$14,000 to \$35,000 per day.