



## HeloPod® - *Proven Under Fire*

It was the afternoon of May 11th and Laguna Beach Fire received a call from Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) Air Ops asking them to begin filling their 4,600 gallon HeloPod® (high capacity helicopter Dip Source and Cistern). Within minutes they were unlocking the built-in cabinet and rolling out the hose and connecting it to the hydrant. Within 6 minutes it was filled at a rate of 800 GPM. A fast moving fire had broken out in a neighboring city of Laguna Niguel and the 30 mph winds were driving the fire up hill in brush that hadn't burned in 40 years or more. Up that hill was a community of multi-million dollar homes.

The HeloPod® was available for this Initial Attack because of a forward thinking Fire Department and City Council that purchased a Helicopter Dip Tank even though the city didn't own a helicopter! They purchased it at the end of the 2020 Fire season and pre-positioned it next to a hydrant in the open space called "Top of The World". They wanted it ready so whenever the helicopters do come, they wanted it to be within the city and be able to drop as many gallons of water as possible on the fire without having to fly to the closet's reservoir \_\_\_\_\_ miles away.

Because it was pre-positioned it was used immediately by OCFA helicopters coming from Fullerton and CAL FIRE helicopter that responded from Prado in San Bernardino County. Sadly, 20 homes were lost after being hit with extreme ember showers and 11 more were damaged, but a lot more homes were saved because of the efforts by helicopters dropping water and the airplanes dropping retardant. The HeloPod is credited with helping to prevent the spread and containing the fire to just 200 acres and likely preventing it from reaching Laguna Beach City limits. During those two days the two helicopters performed over more than **130 Hover Fills and dropped nearly 38,000 gallons of water** while using the automatically filling and re-filling HeloPod®. The fact that it fills automatically... it frees up an Engine and its 3 firefighters to go fight the Fire and protect lives, that would normally have to be stationed to fill a Dip Tank with the Engines pump said one Division Chief.

After the Coastal Fire the local newspaper obtained the following comments:

*"The firefighters and the resources they brought to this Coastal Fire behind the Ranch were impressive. Our hearts go out to the 20 homeowners who lost their homes," said Gene Felder, president of the Top of the World Neighborhood Association. The Top of the World residents had a front-row seat to the aerial firefighting efforts using the HeloPod®.*

*"This underscores the need for more HeloPods strategically placed around town, persistent fuel modification around our perimeter, and diligence by our residents to manage fuel around homes," Sue Kempf current mayor of Laguna Beach wrote.*



Background:

We spoke with Bill Ward and he said, there are dozens of HeloPods® that have already been purchased and have been or being pre-positioned or used Tactically in southern county. Including nine by Los Angeles County Air Ops and the Riverside County Board of Supervisors and CAL FIRE that will pre-position two in the dry mountain community of Idyllwild that have no open water sources. Additionally, Los Angeles Water & Power have purchased HeloPods® for Los Angeles City Fire Department and California Water Service has provided a grant to purchase a HeloPod®.