

Airbus brings digital technology to firefighting

Nîmes, France, 26 March 2026 – Airbus has just successfully completed a unique first-of-its-kind trial in forest firefighting. By linking aircraft, helicopters, drones and ground personnel via communication and data processing systems, Airbus has demonstrated the ability to carry out highly accurate water drops and significantly reduce the time between fire detection and extinguishment.

The trial mobilised significant resources, including the Airbus H130 FlightLab helicopter, two aircraft, an ATR 72 test aircraft and a Cirrus SR20 light aircraft, four drones including an Airbus Aliaca, and three lorries from the Departmental Fire and Rescue Service of Le Gard (SDIS 30) to collect and process data. To interconnect the entire system, Airbus deployed a local private mobile network bubble in the area, connected to Agnet, the mission-critical communication solution developed by Airbus for security and emergency services.

These tests were carried out by Airbus and its partners at the Garrigues military camp in Nîmes (France), based on scenarios developed with Departmental Fire and Rescue Services (SDIS) as well as the Entente Valabre, a public body empowered by the French Ministry of the Interior to assess forest firefighting equipment, provide training for personnel in France and abroad, and which is recognised as an international authority.

In these scenarios, two drones and the light aircraft captured images of the fire area, including infrared footage, and transmitted them in real time to Airbus servers connected to a command centre aboard a ground vehicle. The images were analysed, geolocated and merged with data, including satellite imagery, taking into account the terrain, wind strength and direction measured by a drone, and the location of firefighters on the ground. Data processing systems using AI produced a comprehensive view of the tactical situation on the ground and in the air, and enabled flight paths and water drop points to be transmitted to the helicopter equipped with a precision water drop assistance system and to the ATR72, which was simulating a water bomber.

Unveiled for the first time at the major annual Aerial Firefighting Conference & Exhibition, taking place this year in Rome from 24 to 26 March 2026, this initial trial marks a significant milestone in Airbus's efforts to develop a test environment and a comprehensive ecosystem for combating forest fires.

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This range of solutions includes aerial assets such as aircraft including the A400M and its firefighting kit, helicopters equipped with water buckets, reconnaissance drones, and now solutions currently being integrated to interconnect and significantly enhance the efficiency of coordination between ground and air crews, thanks to communication and data processing systems.

These assets contribute to both indirect and direct firefighting missions, in line with Airbus's commitment to decarbonisation and tackling the growing global challenge posed by forest fires.

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