

# SuperTanker

## CAL FIRE uses DC-10 airtanker in historic firefighting flight

By Mallory Fites, communications assistant, Communications, Sacramento Headquarters

CAL FIRE firefighters have a new tool to battle California wildfires: a modified DC-10 known as Tanker 910. The 31-year-old former passenger jet has traded in its 285 American Airline passengers to fight fires as the first modern Supertanker used in the nation. It is able to dump 12,000 gallons of fire retardant in eight seconds. “It would take 10 drops from a S-2T to duplicate that,” said CAL FIRE Chief of Flight Operations Bill Payne. The stream of retardant creates a consistent 100-foot wide buffer between the threatening wildfire and the communities at risk, allowing ground crews to actively build containment lines. Currently Tanker 910 is on a “call when needed” basis by CAL FIRE at a cost of \$26,500 per hour with a minimum use of three hours.

Tanker 910’s modifications for aerial firefighting include, three external tanks holding 50 tons of water or retardant, a computerized gravity-feed water dump system that’s controlled from the cockpit, and large-scale drop maneuverability. It operates out of Victorville, California and since October 28 has made

9 drops in Washington and 14 drops in California. Most notably on the Day Fire, the fifth largest fire in modern California his-

tory at 162,702 acres. Some other wildland fires that Tanker 910 has been assigned to fight include the Sawtooth Complex in San Bernardino County, the Rico Fire in Monterey County and the Horse Fire in San Diego County and according to Chief Payne, “it was extremely effective; it did exactly what we wanted it to do.”

Tanker 910 was modified and tested over a four-year development program by 10 Tanker Air Carrier LLC using extensive private investment capital. In July, CAL FIRE Aviation Management certified the aircraft after repeated tests in desert drops and runs at higher elevation. The aircraft has yet to be approved for use on federal land, but is currently being evaluated by the U.S. Forest Service.

As for the future, according to research showing increased wildfires in the Wildland Urban Interface, “There will always be a role for smaller tankers but supertankers will have a presence”, stated Chief Payne. An important thing to remember, “Airplanes don’t put out fires, people on the ground put out fires.”



Photos provided courtesy of 10 Tanker Air Carrier Inc.