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A U.S. Coast Guard HH-65 Dolphin helicopter sits on the landing pad at the Point Arena Light Station, joined by a Cal Fire UH-1H (background) as Cal Fire and local USCG Auxiliary members trained in refueling procedures. Photo by Glenn Funk.

Rare pair lands at Lighthouse

By Glenn Funk
Special to the ICO

It's not unusual to see a Coast Guard HH-65 Dolphin helicopter sitting on the helipad at the Point Arena Light Station. They visit with some regularity to refuel at the Station's USCG fuel depot and deliver supplies for the Coast Guard Auxiliary's fuel maintenance team to use in their weekly filtration and test procedures.

But visitors to the Light Station on a recent Monday would have been surprised to see a second helicopter parked on the grass just south of the Coast Guard's Dolphin.

American public expects," said NNA President Merle Baranczyk, Publisher of the Mountain Mail, Salida, Colorado.

This helicopter, a UH-1H Super Huey, wore the livery of Cal Fire, the state's Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention, and carried the code name Cal Fire 902.

A three-man Cal Fire team of pilot Rick Howard and Fire Captains Warren Parrish and Ray Taglio had arrived to receive training in how to refuel their helo using the Coast Guard's Point Arena fuel depot. This ready availability of jet fuel could significantly enhance the effectiveness of Cal Fire 101 in combating local wildfires.

The USCG crew, pilots LT Bernie Garrigan and LT Taylor Andrews and Flight Engineer AMT2 Justin Perez, discussed the special refueling needs of the Super Huey with the Cal Fire pilots and

identified which equipment would be needed if Cal Fire 101 had to refuel at Point Arena. Three local fuel team Auxiliaries, Ken Reynoldson, Chris Jewell and Glenn Funk, assisted the training effort. At least one of these Auxiliaries would be called out as needed to assist CalFire with their refueling operation.

The two helicopters finally departed around noon, each making a sweeping pass by the spectacular Point Arena Lighthouse tower.

If a wildfire breaks out in our Coastal Range woodlands, Cal Fire can now conduct water drops without having to return to Ukiah or Laytonville to refuel, saving precious time and permitting more water drops to quickly end the conflagration.