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NSAR Group and Airb360 Aviation Group Announce Strategic Collaboration in Aerial Firefighting and Innovation

NSAR Group and Airb360 Aviation Group have agreed to pursue a strategic collaboration to develop a European aerial firefighting hub in Notodden, Norway, bringing together aviation operations, specialized training, aircraft conversion, and innovation.



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The collaboration comprises two complementary initiatives: a planned joint venture between NSAR and Airb360, and the planned establishment of a permanent base for AGS - Aviation Global Systems, an Airb360 group company, in partnership with NSAR and Flyteknisk Notodden.

The initiative combines NSAR's focus on preparedness, innovation, and regional partnerships with Airb360's international experience in aviation operations, training, and business development, supported by Flyteknisk Notodden's technical expertise.

A Joint Venture to Develop a European Aerial Firefighting Hub

The planned joint venture between NSAR and Airb360 will bring together aviation operators, pilots, emergency services, manufacturers, and technical specialists to develop and validate aerial firefighting capabilities in Notodden. The ambition is to establish a leading center for operational development and collaboration within the industry.

Activities will include joint exercises, operational procedure development and coordination between aircraft, command, and ground teams. By connecting aviation operations with specialized training, aircraft conversion and technological innovation, the hub aims to strengthen preparedness and improve the effectiveness and safety of wildfire response.

Specialized Training for Pilots and Crew Members

Training will be a strategic pillar of the European hub. At Telemark Test Arena, NSAR and Airb360 aim to develop a comprehensive, competency-based training pathway that builds the skills required for aerial firefighting from the ground up, delivered through Airb360's approved training organisation (ATO).

The approach will emphasize advanced flying skills, judgement and situational awareness, coordination with other aircraft, command and ground teams. It will combine theory with progressively advanced flight training across different aircraft types, including operations in challenging terrain and demanding conditions.

Notodden offers a location few training centres can match. The airport has ramp access directly into Heddalsvannet, with lakes, forest and mountain terrain within minutes of the runway. This allows realistic training on both land and water in one place, for crews at local, national and international level. Many countries do not have access to comparable training areas, giving Telemark Test Arena the potential to become a world-class training location.

Specialized elements will include multi-aircraft coordination, water-scooping maneuvers, water-drop techniques, operational procedures and mission management, reinforced through realistic scenarios and joint exercises. The objective is to develop well-rounded aerial firefighting professionals and support continuous improvement in operational standards. Program development and delivery will be subject to relevant approvals.

AGS Base and Aircraft Conversion

AGS, the exclusive distributor of Heatwave floats in its agreed territories, plans to establish a permanent base in Notodden with NSAR and Flyteknisk Notodden. The base will support commercial and technical activities across Europe and the African and Middle Eastern markets where AGS holds exclusive distribution rights. Activities will include float supply, manufacturer coordination, technical support, and market development.

Developed by Momentum Aeronautics, Heatwave floats enable amphibious firefighting aircraft to operate from land and water, scooping water between successive drops rather than returning to an airfield to refill.

The partners will work to establish local conversion capabilities for the Air Tractor AT-802 series, with the aim of commencing conversion activities in the first quarter of 2027, subject to final agreements, investment, and applicable technical approvals. The initial phase will require knowledge transfer, technical personnel training, and investment in facilities, lifting equipment and specialized tools.



Heatwave-equipped amphibious firefighting aircraft. Photo: NSAR.

Potential Licensed Production

Building on Flyteknisk Notodden's expertise in composite materials and seaplane maintenance, the parties will also explore the possibility of establishing licensed float production in Notodden. This could create opportunities for regional suppliers in manufacturing, quality control and logistics. Any production activity will depend on agreements with the manufacturing rights holder and compliance with applicable technical, commercial and regulatory requirements.

Telemark Test Arena - Innovation, Operations and Coordination

The initiative includes the development of the Telemark Test Arena in collaboration with Notodden Municipality, the airport and local fire and rescue services.

Notodden offers a distinctive combination of modern airport infrastructure, runway facilities with ramp access to the lake, strong maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) expertise, and surrounding forests and challenging terrain. Together, these provide a setting for integrated land- and water-based aviation training, operational exercises, and technology testing.

The arena will bring together operators, emergency services, technology providers, and specialist organizations to test solutions and develop procedures under realistic conditions. Innovation activities will include exploring the integration of drones, sensors, communication systems, and decision-support tools.

Regular exercises and evaluation will help improve coordination between aircraft, command centers and ground teams, strengthen operational procedures, and enhance the safety of emergency response personnel.

Regional Value and International Reach

Although focused primarily on Europe, the initiative aims to connect operators, manufacturers, training centers, and specialist organizations in other markets through the partners' international networks.

For Notodden and Telemark, the ambition is to create long-term value through skilled jobs, supplier development, exports, and international activity. Development will be phased, with aircraft conversion as the immediate priority, followed by operational, training, innovation and industrial activities.

Through this collaboration, NSAR, Airb360 and Flyteknisk Notodden aim to develop new European aerial firefighting capabilities. The initiative combines NSAR's expertise in preparedness, innovation, and regional collaboration, Airb360's operational, training and business expertise, and Flyteknisk Notodden's aircraft maintenance and technical capabilities, supported by the industrial potential of Notodden and the Telemark region.

Work on the joint venture structure, collaboration agreements, financing, and necessary approvals is ongoing.

About the Partners

NSAR Group AS - Nordic Sky Aerial Response (www.nsar.no) is a Norwegian group focused on developing integrated solutions for airborne preparedness and response, combining aviation operations, specialized training, technological innovation, and operational coordination. NSAR works with research institutions, emergency services and aviation partners to develop new capabilities, strengthen collaboration between aerial and ground resources, and establish an international hub for aerial firefighting in Notodden.

Airb360 Aviation Group (www.airb360.com) is an aviation group focused on the development of integrated solutions for the aerial firefighting industry, combining aircraft operations, specialized pilot training, aircraft maintenance and technical services, and the development of new aviation capabilities and business opportunities across international markets.

AGS - Aviation Global Systems (www.aviationglobalsystems.com) is an Airb360 group company focused on the commercial development and distribution of aviation equipment and solutions, including Heatwave amphibious floats developed by Momentum Aeronautics. AGS supports the expansion of these products across its appointed territories and works with manufacturers and local technical partners to develop commercial, technical, and industrial capabilities.

Flyteknisk Notodden (www.flyteknisk.no) is Europe's most experienced seaplane maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) provider, with specialist expertise in composite materials and repairs. Based at Notodden Airport, Norway, the company combines aircraft maintenance and technical services with support for aircraft conversions, knowledge transfer, and technical personnel training, contributing to the development of local technical and industrial capabilities.

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