

Does the Indian Air Force need dedicated firefighting aircraft and equipment?



IAF An-32s can be modified for aerial firefighting roles (Photo: Vayu)

The devastating forest fires in Uttarakhand in April 2024 highlighted the fragility of our natural environment.



A DC-10 Tanker operated by a private contractor for the U.S. Forest Service demonstrates a water drop (Photo: USFS)

With over 600 fires reported within days, thousands of hectares of forest were destroyed, wildlife was displaced and human lives were at serious risk. Despite the efforts of local authorities and volunteers, the mountainous terrain made containment slow and inefficient.

This event has emphasised the urgent need for dedicated aerial firefighting aircraft in the Indian Air Force. While local authorities worked hard, their efforts were hindered by the difficult terrain and lack of proper aerial support. A specialised fleet, equipped with water bombers, helicopters and fire suppression technologies, would be crucial in future firefighting operations, especially in regions like Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

Global practices in aerial firefighting

Around the world, militaries have deployed specialised equipment to support firefighting. In the United States, DC-10, C-130 aircraft and helicopters with water buckets are used for aerial firefighting, delivering water and fire retardants. Australia's Royal Air Force deployed aircraft during the 2019–2020 bushfires, while Canada uses