



# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ROCKET ASSOCIATION

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SECTION 430

## USEFUL INFO FOR OBTAINING A LAUNCH SITE

Thanks for being interested in obtaining a launch site! There aren't enough people out there willing to put in the time and effort required to secure a legal launch site, and we sincerely hope you will succeed!

Among the first of many things to consider when looking for a launch site:

- What kinds of rockets do you wish to fly? (“[Model Rockets](#)”?, “[High Power Rockets](#)”, both?)
- Who is the fire authority that has jurisdiction? (They will issue the launch permit)
- Who is the property owner? (You will need their permission)
- Will the rockets I fly require FAA waiver?
- Is the launch site safe? (Dry brush? Power lines? Will adults or children not connected to the launch be in the area?)
- Are you familiar with and do you have copies of all the applicable Local, State, and Federal regulations?

The terms “[Model Rocket](#)” and “[High Power Rocket](#)” have specific legal definitions. Some agencies have slightly different or qualified definitions.

The FAA revised their regulations several years ago so that their definition of a “Model Rocket” now agrees with the NAR and NFPA limits and are exempt from FAA regulation **as long as they are operated safely and do not present a hazard to aircraft**. For “High Power Rockets” (HPR) refer to Federal Aviation Regulations [FAR 101](#) and please read the referenced info to understand all of the definitions and regulations. Some HPR do not require an FAA waiver if the liftoff mass of the rocket and the propellant mass is below the [noted limit](#).

Launching of “Model Rockets” anywhere in the State of California requires the permission of the property owner and the permission of the local fire department. This fire department permission should usually be in the form of a written permit according to the California State Fire Marshal (otherwise you may not be able to prove to a police or fire officer who stops to challenge you at your launch site that you have permission).

CA state law defines a “Model Rocket” and “Model Rocket Motor” with antiquated limits of 500 grams maximum liftoff weight and no handling of motor components (and non-metallic motor casing). This means for a “Model Rocket” launch, you must observe the 500 gram limit and cannot use reloadable motors – even those in the “Model Rocket” class. Note that reloadable motors were classified as “Model Rocket Motors” for many years and may have the CSFM seal of classification indicating this – in which case they may be launched as “Model Rocket Motors”. People are trying to get this old law revised to match the national definitions (or simply defer to the national definitions). If this changes, we will update this document and post a notice on the SCRA YahooGroup.

For our Santa Fe Dam launch site we have a permit from the LA County Fire Department that lets us fly Model Rockets as long as we follow the [NAR Model Rocket Safety Code](#) and the CA 500 gram limit. The Safety Code limits us to a single G motor as the maximum power because of the field size. The Fire Authority for Lucerne Dry Lake does not wish to write up written permits *for Model Rockets* due to the unique nature of the dry lakebed launch site.

Orange County has many different Fire Authorities. There is the Orange County Fire Authority that covers a large portion of the county as well as providing contracted fire protection for some cities in OC. Other cities have their own Fire Departments. If you have a launch site in an OCFA covered area, then you still need to obtain property owner permission (this means **all** property, including schools and parks), but for lower power Model Rockets a Fire Permit is no longer required. See the reference material linked on the next page.

For school rocketry programs in Los Angeles County, the LA County Fire Department has a special “School Inspection Unit” that issues the Model Rocket launching permits for schools. You’ll have to look up your local unit as they have several offices around the County. Their office hours are usually very early in the morning as they spend most of the day out inspecting schools.

To obtain a permit, you may have to form an NAR club or “Section” which will give you liability insurance. NAR Sections can also obtain special insurance certificates for property owners. SCRA has always had to obtain special certificates for our sites.

High Power Rocket operators require special licenses from the California State Fire Marshal as well as special permits from the Authority Having Jurisdiction for your launch site AND you need to apply for and be granted a waiver from the FAA. Our club does not engage in HPR, so we avoid all this extra work. We usually refer folks interested in HPR to ROC. ROC has HPR launching permits and FAA waivers for the Lucerne Dry Lake site and conducts large launches once a month. The link to ROC is on the SCRA website links page.

For your specific launch site, you will need to contact the responsible agency yourself. DO NOT just accept the word of a friend “who’s been doing it”. You are the one who will be legally responsible for your launch site. We have attached a partial list of contacts that our club has used for permits and permission. You will have to find your own local contacts. Good luck!

### **USEFUL CONTACTS:**

(This is a partial list of contacts to help save you time and effort. This list is by no means complete!)

Handy information sheet on the different limits for Model and High Power Rockets:

<http://mebowitz.com/MR-HPR chart-2009.pdf>

CONTACT **YOUR** LOCAL FIRE AUTHORITY (Look in your phone book) Determine which Fire Authority has jurisdiction for your launch site. It could be your County Fire Authority or it could be a specific city Fire Department. If you cannot find out through the internet, call your local fire station (but be aware that they are not always familiar with Model Rocket permit/regulatory issues at the local station).

For a copy of State regulations:

CALIFORNIA STATE FIRE MARSHAL <http://osfm.fire.ca.gov/>  
7171 BOWLING DR SUITE 600  
SACRAMENTO CA 95823  
916-445-8375

For Orange County regulations & permits:

ORANGE COUNTY FIRE AUTHORITY <http://www.ocfa.org/>  
180 S WATER ST  
ORANGE CA 92666  
714-744-0577  
<https://www.ocfa.org/AboutUs/AboutOCFA.aspx#servicearea>  
<https://www.ocfa.org/AboutUs/FireStations.aspx>  
<https://tinyurl.com/wqoqflu>

For LA County regulations and permits: Contact your local fire inspector.

Schools should also contact their “School Inspection Unit”. <https://www.fire.lacounty.gov/fire-prevention-division/>

For FAA waivers for High Power Rockets (read Federal Aviation Regulations [FAR 101](#)):

NAR website info on waivers: <https://www.nar.org/high-power-rocketry-info/>

If you are planning to engage in “High Power Rocket” activities it is recommended that you consult the Federal Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives (BATFE). They can provide a copy of “ATF - EXPLOSIVES LAW AND REGULATIONS (ATF P 5400.7)” which will help guide you as you may need a BATFE Low Explosives User Permit to store some igniters and ejection charge black powder. You will also want to obtain a copy of NFPA Code 1127. Additional advice is located on the NAR website. You will also need various California State licenses and permits (state and local).

NFPA 1122 for Model Rockets, NFPA 1127 for High Power Rockets:

NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION <http://www.nfpa.org/>  
1 BATTERYMARCH PARK  
QUINCY MA 02269-9101  
617-770-3000