

What's Trending with Rotorcraft Safety?

The trend in U.S. rotorcraft accidents in 2012 reinforced the message that the International Helicopter Safety Team (IHST), the government, and the rotorcraft industry groups have communicated for years; that is, too many helicopter accidents occur in three industry sectors: personal/private, instructional/training, and aerial application.

These three sectors accounted for more than half of the 39 fatalities and about 60 percent of the 148 total U.S.-registered rotorcraft accidents in 2012, far outdistancing the number of accidents that occurred in other sectors. In raw numbers, 21 people lost their lives among the 89 accidents in these three sectors last year.

This trend is not new. IHST's analysis of U.S. rotorcraft accidents in 2000, 2001, and 2006 collectively points to personal/private, instructional/training, and aerial application as the industry sectors responsible for the highest numbers of U.S. rotorcraft accidents.

Perhaps more disturbing is that the FAA estimates that these three sectors account for a low percentage of the overall U.S. rotorcraft hours flown. That equates to an accident rate per hour flown being much higher than that of other industry sectors.

Message Received?

The accident trend continues even though IHST, the FAA, other government groups, and the rotorcraft industry have reinforced the message that pilots and operators need to take steps to ensure safer flights. IHST has provided detailed safety recommendations and policies, pilot safety checklists, accident statistics and information, and alerts about accident trends.

For some, a perception may exist that helicopters working in emergency medical services (EMS), air tours, and offshore operations are responsible for the most accidents. That perception is understandable because of the media interest and public scrutiny those industries often receive when an accident occurs. Yet, in 2012, the

combined total of accidents in EMS, air tours, and offshore industry sectors was less than half of the number of accidents from personal/private operations alone.

The positive news is that the helicopters we fly, regardless of the manufacturer, continue to perform remarkably well. In 2012, accidents were rarely caused by the failure of a rotorcraft system or part. This fact is consistent with IHST observations during the past decade.

Unfortunately, this just reaffirms the uncomfortable reality that lapses in judgment and decision-making by pilots lead to most accidents. Examples of such lapses in 2012 included: selecting flight profiles at altitudes below what was necessary (typically below 100 feet AGL); exceeding the aircraft performance envelope by operating the aircraft over published weight limits; landing with a tailwind resulting in loss of control; inadequate power margin during high density altitude operations; and electing to proceed VFR into weather that was predominantly instrument meteorological conditions (IMC).

Outreach Outlook

IHST, a government-industry led organization, has reached out to combat this trend through news releases and other communications to industry trade magazines, helicopter websites, and social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.

This leads to inevitable questions. If the message is out there, are the right people reading it? And if they are reading it, is any meaningful change occurring as to how they fly helicopters? The high accident numbers in these industry sectors suggest that efforts made to date just have not had enough of an impact.

How can we make 2013 better for these industry sectors? How can we reach more individual operators to make sure they get to share another birthday, anniversary, or vacation with their loved ones? The data and analysis from 2012 paint a clear picture of the problem. But if nothing changes, it is just another year worth of numbers.

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Photo courtesy of IHST



Members of IHST's Executive Committee



Flight Forum

Great Job!

I want to say how great a job you are doing at the helm (yoke really) in making the technical journal information stuff readable, informative and not stuffy or too authoritarian for us independent minded pilots!

— R. C.

We are glad you find the magazine useful. Our team includes pilots and aviation junkies; we try very hard to be both relevant and interesting. Nice to hear that we've hit the mark!

Subtle Differences

Thanks for an excellent article on the ICAO phonetic alphabet. Most people are not aware that our ICAO alphabet was created by the International Telecommunications Union in the early 1950s. It was developed by a panel of linguists to be readily usable in most modern languages. One little known feature is the spelling of *Alfa* which is almost always commonly misspelled as “alpha,” and *Juliett*, not “Juliet.” The reason behind this is because if you ask a Frenchman or German to pronounce “alpha,” he or she will say “alp-ha.” In French, “Juliet” would be enunciated “joo-ee-ay.” Not useful for distinct clarity at all! Thanks again for the good work.

— H. R.

Thanks for the feedback and the additional information. Linguistics and communications are really fascinating!

Flying Blind?

I just learned that they are planning to base a company that will build UAVs at my home base of (Ormond Beach) KOMN. KOMN is a very busy training airport with lots of traffic and non-native English speaking pilots. I can't help but think this will be a very dangerous mix of air traffic. Plus, I haven't seen any guidance on how UAVs are supposed to be integrated into the “see and avoid” concept.

— Ed

As you may know, there is a lot of interest in expanding the use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) in the National Airspace System. The FAA is working on overall plans for safe integration of UASs into the NAS. In the meantime, please contact your local FSDO to discuss issues and concerns specific to your airport.

Loving the E-Reader Option!

Opening the .epub file in iBooks was easy and worked flawlessly. Thanks for the great idea and good work!

— David

We appreciate the feedback and are glad it worked so well for you. Happy reading!

Bahamas Requirements

I was reading the Nov/Dec 2012 issue of your great magazine when I came across what I suspect may be an error. On page 18 you list the requirements for sport pilots to fly to the Bahamas. While I don't know where to find the primary source for these requirements, you list, “A log book endorsement certifying the pilot is authorized to perform cross country flights.” No such thing exists for sport pilots under the FARs or AC 61-65E. Such a requirement only applies to student pilots and recreational pilots, not sport pilots. Thanks again for another great issue.

— Helen

Thanks for your comments on the magazine. Concerning your question about requirements for sport pilots flying to Bahamas: Although it wasn't indicated, the sentence in regard to having a logbook endorsement for cross country is intended specifically for student pilots. Anyone with a sport pilot certificate would have already had this endorsement. In hindsight, we probably should have added the words student pilot next to that sentence to make it clearer.

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