

Vertically Speaking

So, You Want to Be a Helicopter Pilot

How do you become a helicopter pilot? Where should you start?

“The best place for young people today to start,” says James Lamb, Central Region, FAA Safety Team, “is to find a training provider that trains well and also helps with career development.”

There are hundreds of part 141 training centers as well as part 61 programs, which provide helicopter instruction. In addition, selected colleges and universities provide helicopter flight instruction. For example, Kansas State University at Salina offers rotary wing flight training. To help in selecting the right school, the University Aviation Association offers guidance on “Considerations When Choosing a School.”

The price tag to get the training and experience to earn a living as a helicopter pilot can be hefty. It’s important to find the right place to provide students “with the skills, knowledge, and understanding as well as with a range of flying experience,” says Aviation Safety Inspector Eric Carroll. “Beyond receiving training, it’s important for prospective helicopter pilots to have an understanding of the prerequisites for employment and a plan to achieve them.”

To get a head start, as well as for continuing education, check out the courses at the FAASafety.gov’s Learning Center on helicopter operations. [Helicopter – General and Flight Aerodynamics](#) covers the basics and explains the four forces — lift, weight, thrust, and drag — that act on a helicopter in flight. It also explains additional physical characteristics and effects that are unique to a helicopter and its rotor system while in flight.

There are other courses, too, along with safety seminars and special events, which the FAA Safety Team (FAASTeam) puts on in cooperation with Helicopter Association International (HAI). If you are not already signed up, register at FAASafety.gov and on the Certificates & Ratings tab specify the rotorcraft certificates you have/are seeking in order to get information about helicopter events.

Check out the FAA’s *Rotorcraft Flying Handbook*, a technical manual for applicants preparing for their private, commercial, or flight instructor pilot

certificates with a helicopter or gyroplane class rating. The handbook includes detailed coverage of aerodynamics, flight controls, systems, performance, flight maneuvers, emergencies, and aeronautical decision-making.

It is never too early to get involved with a professional association and to start reading helicopter publications and websites. At www.rotor.com, HAI offers a student membership, with the first year free for full- or part-time students enrolled in a flight training school, A & P school, college, or university. The American Helicopter Society International (AHS), billed as the world’s premier vertical flight technical society, also offers a student membership and has several technical publications. Both HAI and AHS offer scholarships.

Among the leading trade publications are *Rotor & Wing*, which includes a training tab on its website. For those interested in helicopter maintenance, check out www.helimx.com, a magazine dedicated to helicopter maintenance.

Educational resources are also available from manufacturers. For example, Bell Helicopter has a number of educational and safety materials available on its Helicopter Professional Pilots Safety Program, or *HELIPROPS*, website including its Human AD newsletter, which stresses the human factors involved in actual accidents and incidents.

Lynn McCloud is a contributing editor for FAA Safety Briefing.

Learn More

Bell Helicopter / HELIPROPS

www.bellhelicopter.com/en_US/Training/Heliprops/Heliprops.html

FAA Rotorcraft Flying Handbook

www.faa.gov/library/manuals/aircraft/media/faa-h-8083-21.pdf

FAASafety.gov Learning Center: Helicopter – General and Flight Dynamics

https://faasafety.gov/gslac/ALC/course_content.aspx?cID=104m