

HELICOPTER SAFETY NEWS

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PART ONE

Four Helicopter Accidents and Seven Fatalities in Just Eight Days:

These Grim Statistics Reflect the Need for a Culture Change Says the IHST.

From Oct. 10th to Oct 17th, the U.S. helicopter community experienced four accidents that started out as “routine” general aviation/private flights, but each ended with fatal results.

- On Oct. 10th, a helicopter carrying three businessmen returning from a golf outing crashed into a wooded area in northeastern Pennsylvania as it struggle to land in less than favorable weather. Two people were killed.
- On the same day, Oct. 10th, a low-flying helicopter struck a guy-wire supporting a radio tower near Crowley, Louisiana, killing the pilot.
- On Oct. 12th, a helicopter crashed during an evening flight in a wooded area near Fredericksburg, Texas, killing all three onboard.
- On Oct. 17th, a helicopter went down and caught fire in woods in Bucks County, Penn., after taking off in the early morning, killing the pilot.

Although each of these accidents must be fully investigated before a probable cause is determined, their circumstances reflect a need for the private helicopter pilot and helicopter community to take a critical look at its risk mitigation efforts and safety practices.

Seven people will not be coming home to their families, but this fact is not the result of them taking on a perilous task. Despite repeated TV and newspaper reports to the contrary, treacherous missions are not at the root of a stubbornly persistent helicopter accident rate and helicopter fatalities.

As an industry, we need to focus on the “expected, easy” mission and on conventional risks such as changes in weather. One out of every five rotorcraft accidents occurs during “routine” general aviation/private flying, and another one out of five accidents occurs during instruction flights.

Pilots are returning from golf outings, taking quick sales trips, and making other uneventful, ordinary, mundane flights. But each one of these ordinary, everyday, short trips includes serious and critical safety factors and decisions that will either prevent or result in an accident. The risk assessment of night flying, of weather, of fatigue, and stress require a refocus by helicopter pilots and operators, especially during the “ordinary” flights. When stepping into a helicopter, every passenger and every pilot should think about the simple risks identified in the flight and how the risks will be mitigated to an acceptable level.

We are learning a grim lesson: Many pilots are not evaluating the risk when they feel it is a standard, low-risk flight and the consequences of this mindset are tragic.

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