



Interagency Aviation Lessons Learned



No. IALL 07-04

July 8, 2007

Page 1 of 2

Subject: Interagency Aviation Lessons Learned
Area of Concern: Unnecessary Risk Taking as Normal Behavior
Distribution: To All Aviation Users

Discussion: High motivation, a sense of urgency, and a genuine desire to get the job done can cause experienced and well-intentioned pilots and managers to take unnecessary and potentially dangerous risks.

Despite a continued drought and very high temperatures in the Western United States, the 2007 fire season has seen less aviation activity to date than in previous seasons. In fact, as of the beginning of July 2007, Call When Needed (CWN) helicopter flight hours for the Department of the Interior were down 49% as compared to the same period in 2006. This lack of flight activity could pose a financial hardship for vendors and create situations where aircrew might be tempted to make poor decisions to accomplish a mission. Government managers, in turn, could also be motivated by an urgent desire to support assigned missions, firefighters on the ground, prove the value of their aircraft, and/or to support their vendors.

While we need properly motivated personnel who understand the urgency associated with natural resource and fire and aviation operations, a misplaced desire to “get into the action” can cloud one’s judgment and allow inappropriate and unnecessary risks to be taken. Our mishap files and the SAFECOM database have too many examples of personnel getting into trouble when they were “just trying to do a good job”. Please take a moment to review the following summaries.

A Bell 206 BIII with fixed floats landed to the water and taxied to a water-monitoring station’s dock to off-load a passenger. The main rotor blade struck the station’s radio antenna damaging the rotor blade (\$5,900). The pilot was trying to get as close to the dock as possible so the passenger wouldn’t have to step out into the water.

A ski-equipped DeHavilland Beaver (DHC-2) landed to a glacier to drop off two passengers and construction material. The pilot elected to land against the flow of traffic and to taxi outside of the normal taxi area and as a result impacted a crevasse substantially damaging the aircraft. Against the wishes of the passengers the pilot tried to maneuver the airplane closer to a construction site.

An Air Tractor (AT-802) made an off-airport landing due to fuel starvation. The pilot had been told to hold for a thunderstorm passing through the fire area and despite knowing that his fuel level was very low elected to accept holding in order to drop his retardant load on the fire instead of returning to the airport and dumping the load in the approved jettison area. NOTE: Situations like this happen almost every year.

A PZL Mielec M-18A (turbine modification) made an off-airport landing after dropping its retardant due to insufficient power to escape rising terrain in conjunction with a strong downwind condition. The pilot (and other pilots supporting this event) understood that the winds had been increasing throughout the day and that the intended drop involved a quartering tailwind. Rather than calling it quits as the temperature and winds increased the pilot “pressed on” into a situation that he didn’t escape from.

These are just a few of the events that have found their way into the accident files in the past few years due primarily to highly motivated personnel with a sense of mission urgency and a strong desire to “get it done.” While we obviously need our aircrews and managers to be motivated and to **react appropriately** to the urgency of any given situation, **that reaction must be balanced against all of the variables for each specific mission (i.e. human performance, equipment limitations, and the physical and mission environment). What we don’t want is for unnecessary risk taking to become normal behavior.**

Before you get trapped in a situation that you can’t recover from, take a minute or two of your time to review the **“Twelve Standard Aviation Questions That Shout “Watch Out!”** (NFES 1129) and **apply them to each and every mission.**

Twelve Standard Aviation Questions That Shout
“Watch Out!”

1. Is this flight necessary?
2. Who is in charge?
3. Are all hazards identified and have you made them known?
4. Should you stop the operation on the flight due to change in conditions?
 Communications Weather Confusion
 Turbulence Personnel Conflicting Priorities
5. Is there a better way to do it?
6. Are you driven by an overwhelming sense of urgency?

NFES 1129 (1998)

7. Can you justify your actions?
8. Are there other aircraft in the area?
9. Do you have an escape route?
10. Are any rules being broken?
11. Are communications getting tense?
12. Are you deviating from the assigned operations of flight?

Anyone can refuse or curtail a flight when an unsafe condition may exist. Never let undue pressure (expressed or implied) influence your judgement or decisions. Avoid mistakes, don't hurry!

NFES 1129 (1998)

/s/ Robert Galloway
Robert Galloway
Aviation Safety Manager

/s/ Ron Hanks
Ron Hanks
National Aviation Safety
and Training Manager