



Interagency Aviation Safety Alert



No. IA 08-07

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Subject: Effective SAFECOM Use
Area of Concern: All Aviation Activities
Distribution: All Fire and Aviation Personnel

Issue: The interagency SAFECOM system is misunderstood, under-utilized, and on occasion, misused. Failure to understand and use the system as it is intended can not only prolong an unsafe situation or increase cost, but can result in injury or loss of life. Misuse of the SAFECOM system, or use for purposes other than reporting safety concerns, jeopardizes the communication needed for the SAFECOM system to work effectively.

Discussion: The SAFECOM system originated as a voluntary reporting system for the identification and tracking of hazards in an effort to prevent mishaps. The sole purpose of the SAFECOM system is for accident prevention. It is a tool used to encourage the reporting of any condition, observance, act, maintenance problem, or circumstance which has the potential to cause an aviation or aviation-related accident. While it is imperative that problems and issues be addressed at the local level, it is beneficial to share problems and solutions system-wide. The SAFECOM system is one of our best tools for accident prevention and a major component of the Safety Management System (SMS) and a part of our culture to be a High Reliability Organization (HRO).

The SAFECOM system contains specific information concerning vendors, aircraft tail numbers, and pilot names that link them to specific acts. As a result, misuse of that information, although unintentional, has occurred.

The following are examples of how SAFECOM information MUST NOT BE USED:

- * Claims:
 - SAFECOM information cannot be used to support claims for or against the government. All information gathered for this purpose must come from other sources.
- * Contracting:
 - The Daily Diary (HCM-1) currently instructs Helicopter Managers to note or reference SAFECOMs in the daily sequence of events. However, managers **must not** address SAFECOMs in their daily diaries since the diaries are used by Contracting Officers. While safety events need to be documented in the daily diary, it is strictly prohibited to mention that a SAFECOM was filed or to attach a SAFECOM as a record.
 - Contractor performance evaluations. The Federal Acquisition Regulations (FARs) section 42.1503 addresses the government requirement for holding past performance information. The SAFECOM does not meet the requirements of the FARs as an acceptable past performance record. Therefore, SAFECOM records/data are not to be referenced when evaluating past performance for any contract solicitation.

- * Complaint system:
 - The SAFECOM system is not a venue for complaints.
- * Personnel performance:
 - Access to the SAFECOM system for the purpose of gathering information to be used in any punitive action is prohibited. SAFECOMs are to be used for mishap prevention ONLY.
- * Hazard mitigation:
 - Using the SAFECOM system as a means for first action, instead of communicating events with appropriate individuals, can erode working relationships and add distrust of the system's intent. Submitting a SAFECOM is not a substitute for "on-the-spot" correction(s) to a safety concern, but a tool used to identify, document, track, and correct safety related issues.

Recommendation:

Our goal is to create a "Reporting Culture" where people are encouraged to voice safety issues and concerns without fear of reprimand or reprisal. It is important that we maintain a just environment that encourages open and honest reporting of our mistakes and failures, as well as our successes. It is essential that we continually learn from our experiences, both good and bad, and to improve our effectiveness and execution. A reporting culture is essential in communicating potential hazards or trends for use in accident prevention.

If you become aware of an unsafe event or hazard, notify your supervisor, Regional Aviation Safety Officer (RASM), Regional Aviation Officer (RAO), State Aviation Manager (SAM), Helicopter Inspection Pilot (HIP), Aircraft maintenance Inspector (AMI), Unit Aviation Officer / Forest Aviation Officer (UAO/FAO), etc. and ensure that the information is communicated so that it can be dealt with appropriately. Using the SAFECOM system as designated in Chapter 9 of the Interagency Helicopter Operations Guide (IHOG) for maintenance related issues is appropriate. Discuss events/hazards with all affected flight crews and personnel to resolve situations at the local level, then elevate to an appropriate level for resolution only when necessary. Finally, use the SAFECOM to document your proactive risk mitigation. SAFECOMs should be used to report good things too.

For additional information on the use of the SAFECOM system, please review [SAFECOM IA 06-01; The SAFECOM System – Your chance to speak out!](#)

SAFECOMs provide the necessary feedback for development of the following communication tools:

- Safety Alerts
- Information sharing Memos
- Mechanical deficiencies (ADs, SBs, etc)
- Lessons Learned
- Training needs
- Safety trends
- Technical Bulletins
- AirWards

In our effort to revitalize and make the SAFECOM system a robust accident prevention tool, we have established an Interagency SAFECOM Working Group to address issues and look for new ideas to increase participation and trust in the system.

Your thoughts and ideas are important to us; please submit comments or ideas to Barb Hall at: bhall@fs.fed.us.

/s/ Robert Galloway

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