

AERONAUTICAL CHARTING FORUM
Charting Group
Meeting 08-02 – October 22-23, 2008

RECOMMENDATION DOCUMENT

FAA Control # 08-02-210

Subject: Charting Medical Facility Heliports for EMS

Background/Discussion:

An FAA AFS-250 meeting was held with Industry HEMS groups to discuss critical safety issues following numerous Emergency Services Helicopter Accidents occurring while enroute to pick up, or while transporting patients to medical facilities for emergency treatment;

In particular a most recent Fatal Mid-Air Collision between two HEMS helicopters approaching the same hospital helipad in Phoenix, Arizona.

Recommendations:

The industry participants requested all medical heliport/helipad information be available and displayed on an aviation map used by helicopter pilots. The participants believed this to be an important safety issue that could help reduce future emergency service's helicopter accidents.

It is recommended that heliports/helipads be placed on VFR Terminal Area Charts (routing area), and Helicopter Route Charts be developed for all large metropolitan areas.

Comments:

This recommendation affects the Contiguous United States including Alaska and Hawaii.

Charted frequency information will facilitate communications traffic on the same radio frequency and will mitigate confusion or lack of communication between several inbound aircraft. Currently multiple aircraft, owned by different operators, enroute to the same medical facility may be operating on their own dispatch frequency because they are unaware of a CTAF frequency designated for the destination helipad. This poses a serious safety issue.

Charted Heliport locations will also assist and mitigate low visibility operations concerns.

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MEETING 08-02: Mr. James Lamb, FAA Safety Team (FAAST) briefed the issue to the ACF. He cited one recent fatal midair accident in Flagstaff, AZ, this year that involved two EMS providers flying into a single heliport. Compounding the problem are younger, less experienced pilots entering into the system as Vietnam era pilots retire.

On behalf of the Emergency Medical Service (EMS) industry, participants of the FAA Safety Team requested all medical heliport/helipad information be available and displayed on aviation maps for use by helicopter pilots. The participants in the EMS/FAA meeting believed this to be an important safety feature that could help reduce future EMS helicopter accidents. Charting frequency information will facilitate communications between traffic on the same frequency and will mitigate confusion or lack of communication between several inbound aircraft.

Currently multiple aircraft, owned by different operators, enroute to the same medical facility may be operating on individual dispatch frequencies because they may be unaware of a CTAF frequency designated for the destination heliport or helipad. Charted heliport/helipad locations would also assist and mitigate low visibility operation concerns. Although EMS helicopter pilots may be in contact with ATC, they often do not communicate or coordinate directly with one another. The FAAST believes this poses a serious safety issue.

The EMS/FAA representatives also recommended that heliports/helipads be charted on US FAA VFR Terminal Area Charts (TAC), and that Helicopter Route Charts be developed for all large metropolitan areas. Mr. Rick Fecht, FAA/NACO, stated that NACO has 9 helicopter route charts now. Mr. John Moore, FAA/NACO, asked what their definition of “large” was, referring to “large metropolitan areas”.

Mr. Moore and Mr. Ted Thompson, Jeppesen, expressed a need to address the whole subject of helicopter operations that would consider the availability of source data, aeronautical charting, and availability of information for electronic databases.

Essential issues to consider are:

- What are the requirements?
- What information is necessary to support HEMS operations?
- Where would the source come from?
- How would source data be promulgated and updated?

Mr. Brad Rush, FAA/NFPO commented that the FAA Airports Division would need to be involved, as would NFDC. Also, many heliports and helipads are privately owned and operated. As such, they may not want to give out that information. Hospitals have limited landing privileges.

Mr. Tom Schneider, FAA/AFS-420, commented that FAA NFPO already oversees the development of numerous IFR “special” helicopter procedures. The FAAST’s recommendation expands the subject into the VFR arena.

Mr. Mike Webb, FAA/AFS-420 is already involved in several helicopter issues – but with regard to IFR aspects.

Mr. Lamb agreed to coordinate with Mr. Webb on the issues. Mr. Lamb has been asked to provide additional information at the next ACF to address the issues discussed and specific user requirements.

Mr. Lamb commented that an EMS user group meeting would take place sometime in the near future.

ACTION: Mr. James Lamb to provide additional information at the next ACF.

MEETING 09-01: Mr. James Lamb, FAA Safety Team (FAAST), provided a report highlighting the results and recommendations from the FAA sponsored HEMS Safety Workshop held last March in Kansas City, MO.

Highlights and conclusions:

- Main issue is the need to improve collection and maintenance of heliport/helipad data on a national level.
- Many heliports/helipads are private facilities and operators are reluctant to share data.
- HEMS pilots don't want and would not use additional paper helicopter charts.
- The consensus of the HEMS operators at the conference was that the data would best be used in electronic applications (cockpit displays, dispatch, planning, etc.).

Mr. Ted Thompson, Jeppesen, provided personal insights and observations from the FAAST workshop. His recommendation was that the aspect concerning the need for a new set of helicopter charts has been concluded (not required by HEMS operators).

Mr. John Moore, FAA/NACO, stated that the aspect covering the need for improved collection of heliport and helipad data is best incorporated into the scope of the Airport Source Data Committee led by Mr. Dave Goehler, Jeppesen. The purpose is to address the need to collect and maintain heliport/helipad data. Mr. Thompson recommended closing the issue since it's not a charting issue. It's more of a data collection issue. Mr. Lamb agreed to coordinate with FAA's Airports Office.

CLOSED