



# Interagency Aviation Lessons Learned



No. IA 08-02

July 17, 2008

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**Subject:** Helicopter Longline Operations

**Area of Concern:** Fire Suppression Helicopter Operations

**Distribution:** All Aviation Activities

**Discussion:** Rotor strikes are an operational risk that we mitigate through risk assessment and proper planning. Already this season we have experienced a serious mishap in an external load / longline mission. As a result of this mishap, the company involved issued a letter to all of its pilots that captures the lesson learned and provides excellent direction for future practices. In our opinion, the Chief Pilot's message expresses the concern quite well and is included below in its entirety.

**Lesson Learned:**

"To All Pilots:

We at XXXXX have had a serious incident with potential where a pilot struck the top of a tree with the main rotor blades while performing a long-line mission. The resulting damage has caused considerable component replacement and expense. Luckily, the pilot is still with us so that he and the rest of us can learn from his mistake.

The cause of this is probable lack of attention to obstacles in the area that the load was to be set in. Whether it was from lack of adequate low level reconnaissance, the desire to please the customer, or whatever, is at this time irrelevant.

If you are going to do a long-line mission, and you have not seen the area, go out in the aircraft to do an adequate reconnaissance of the site. This has to include a very critical "low level recon" to determine the length of line needed to clear obstacles in and around the site or if there is an area close that could be used to haul the load internally. This should also include an evaluation of the winds at the site to make sure you will not have to put anything on the blind side of the aircraft, as you put the load down, that could cause a problem. If the load cannot be put in with a 150' line refuse the mission. A suggestion for the use of an alternative site found during your low-level recon will always be supported by this company as will the refusal to do a long-line mission that you may not feel comfortable doing. Don't be "mission driven" to put yourself in the same predicament. Be safe! **IF IN DOUBT, DON'T DO IT!**

Chief Pilot"



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**Closing:** The Forest Service and Department of the Interior agencies support this position and the direction it gives. Help us prevent rotor strikes by being more vigilant in your flying. Remain above the canopy and operate according to the Interagency Helicopter Operations Guide (IHOG), Chapter 11, paragraph XIII D3, 4 as cited below:

“In areas of sloping terrain or with obstacles rising to one or more sides of the cargo pickup/drop off area, or dipsite, the pilot shall maintain rotor clearance from all obstacles equivalent to the IHOG Chart 8-1 landing area safety circle requirements.”

The safety circle requirements for Type 1 helicopters is 110'; Type 2 is 90'; and Type 3 helicopters is 75'.

When obstacles present a risk of contact with aircraft or rotor blades, the pilot should decline the mission until hazards are removed, additional line can be added or a better location can be identified. Pilots have the final say in accepting and/or denying any mission.”

/s/ Robert Galloway  
Robert Galloway  
Aviation Safety Manager

/s/ Ron Hanks  
Ron Hanks  
Chief, Aviation Risk Management  
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