



# Interagency Aviation Lessons Learned



No. IA LL 17-03

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**Subject: Things Falling Off / Out of Aircraft**

**Area of Concern: Flight Operations**

**Distribution: All Aviation Activities**

**Discussion:** A few years ago, a helicopter crashed during a wildlife survey with two biologists and one pilot on board. The aircraft was substantially damaged when it impacted the ground approximately 35 minutes after departure. The pilot and two biologists suffered fatal injuries. The National Transportation Safety Board determined the probable cause of this accident to be an in-flight impact of a passenger's metal clipboard with the helicopter's tail rotor, which resulted in destruction of the tail rotor and subsequent loss of control of the helicopter.



A Lessons Learned was developed and distributed ([IALL 11-01](#)) to alert everyone on the dangers associated with "Foreign Object damage" or FOD.

In recent events, cell phones have been dropped from aircraft while airborne. One instance occurred with doors removed, while another occurred as an aircrew member was attempting to take a video by holding a phone out of a slider window ([SAFECOM 17-304](#)). An additional incident was documented in [SAFECOM 17-101](#) after a pilot left his cellphone on an exterior portion of the aircraft and then took off. His phone was later discovered 20 miles from the point of departure.

Fortunately, there were no injuries or aircraft damage but there was significant potential to repeat the catastrophic event referenced (above). Loose items in an aircraft, including maps, kneeboards, pens, keys, phones or electronic flight bags, can pose a hazard. Any item dropped outside of the aircraft during flight can impact vital components affecting flight controls and ultimately, you and your coworkers safety.

These situations remind us how important it is to take time to ensure everything in the cockpit and cabin area is secured. If photographs are required with doors off or windows open, use a camera or cell phone that has a tether or lanyard attached. Using a camera allows you to keep your gloves on; gloves and cell phones don't always go "hand in hand."

**Bottom Line: Make sure everything is secure – both inside and out of the aircraft.**

*/s/ Keith C. Raley*

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Keith C. Raley  
Chief, Aviation Safety,  
Training, Program Evaluation  
and Quality Management

*/s/ Eric Shambora*

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Eric Shambora  
Acting Branch Chief, Aviation Safety  
Management Systems