



Department of the Interior Lessons Learned

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Subject: Aircraft Operating Condition

Area of Concern: Flight Safety

Distribution: All Aviation Activities

Discussion. During the preparation for departure from an offshore oil and gas facility, a passenger attempted to open the left sliding passenger door of an A-109 helicopter when the door's lower latching rod failed (separated) and the end with the roller fell onto the helideck.



According to witnesses, this door had been very difficult to open and close for quite some time. An investigation into the event revealed that the problem with the left door had never been documented on the maintenance log so that maintenance personnel could correct the problem.

The failure of the lower latching rod was recognized by the pilot, passengers, and the facility operator's helideck personnel. The pilot checked the door and determined that the door functioned properly and would latch securely.

The pilot decided that it would be safe to fly back to their home base at a reduced airspeed and did not notify his company's Maintenance Department prior to departing. The passengers agreed with the pilot's decision (and accepted the risk) and boarded the aircraft for the return flight. The passenger in the left rear-facing seat planned to hold on to the left sliding door's handle to ensure it stayed secure. A member of the operator's helideck crew provided a piece of rope, which the passenger tied to the door handle to make it easier to hold onto.

The pilot stated that he was unaware that a rope was being used by the passenger to hold onto the door handle. After takeoff, the passenger in the right rear seat also took hold of the rope to assist the left seat passenger. Approximately five minutes into the flight, the left passenger relaxed his grip on the rope and the door moved outward enough so that the seal was broken and air rushed into the cabin. The pilot immediately made a precautionary landing on another off-shore platform.

During the flight, the passenger door remained secured by the top latching pin and the passenger door caution light did not illuminate.

After landing, the passengers were picked up by a second aircraft and returned to their base. The pilot remained overnight with the aircraft and the next day a vendor maintenance technician inspected and secured the door with a strap and the aircraft was flown to their base on an FAA-approved ferry permit.

There are several lessons that can be learned from this incident. The BSEE National Aviation Safety Manager offers the following:

1. When you think something's wrong, question it. The pilot and passengers knew for months that the left sliding door on this helicopter was difficult to open and close, yet it was never documented so maintenance could check into it and fix it. If you see something, say something!

2. When you know something's wrong, stop it. When a safety discrepancy is encountered, which in this case was the door latch breaking, report it to the pilot and do not get in the helicopter with the hope that everything is going to be OK. If one passenger had refused to fly in this aircraft the pilot and other passengers would have respected that decision and maintenance would have been notified.

3. In either case, report it. After the precautionary landing, the passengers reminded the pilot to report the problem with the door by filing a SAFECOM, to which the pilot agreed. However, after spending Friday night on the platform and the ensuing weekend, the pilot forgot to submit the SAFECOM. By Monday morning the passengers were on to other missions and weren't thinking of it either. Thankfully, a supervisor was aware of the event and submitted the SAFECOM. Without that supervisor's intervention this event and these lessons learned would be lost...until the next time when the outcome might not be so benign.

4. Perception is Reality. Consider your safety first, but also consider the impression you are making on the general public. Everyone agrees that the safety of our personnel is paramount. But what kind of image are you presenting when others see us taking off in a helicopter with a passenger or aircrew holding on to a rope tied to a door. Lead by example, every day, in every action you take.

/s/ Keith Raley

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