



Civil Aviation Authority
SAFETY NOTICE
Number: SN-2017/003



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Helicopter Operations Flight Planning and Safe Flight Execution

This Safety Notice contains recommendations regarding operational safety.

Recipients must ensure that this Notice is copied to all members of their staff who need to take appropriate action or who may have an interest in the information (including any 'in-house' or contracted maintenance organisations and relevant outside contractors).

Applicability:	
Aerodromes:	Not primarily affected
Air Traffic:	Not primarily affected
Airspace:	Not primarily affected
Airworthiness:	Not primarily affected
Flight Operations:	All Helicopter AOC and PAOC Operators and ATOs conducting professional pilot licence training
Licensed/Unlicensed Personnel:	All Helicopter Pilots, Instructors, Examiners and Operations Staff

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Several helicopter events, including the accidents to Agusta A109E G-CRST¹ in 2013 and AgustaWestland AW139 G-LBAL² in 2014, have highlighted the potential for the conduct of pre-flight planning to have a major impact on the safe outcome of a flight. Similar situations in the USA resulted in specific planning and pre-flight risk assessment requirements being introduced for Emergency Medical Service (EMS) flights there. These requirements were captured in changes to Federal Aviation Regulation (FAR) Part-135 including new sections 615 and 617.³
- 1.2 The purpose of this Safety Notice (SN) is to reinforce to operators, trainers and pilots the essential need for detailed and appropriate pre-flight planning and risk assessment before conducting any flight but in particular those intended to be conducted under the Visual Flight Rules (VFR). The plan then needs to be executed accordingly.
- 1.3 This Safety Notice updates and supersedes SN-2016/002.

2 Background Information

- 2.1 The operator must establish and maintain a system for exercising operational control and supervision over any flight conducted under the terms of its Air Operator Certificate (AOC) or Police AOC (POAC) and in particular to the method for ensuring that the flight can be safely executed. This requirement is also to be met in accordance with EASA-OPS⁴ Part-ORO for

operators of non-commercial complex motor-powered aircraft (Part-NCC and Part-SPO) and commercial specialised operations (Part-SPO). The commander and flight crew have responsibilities and obligations to ensure that a flight is conducted safely. The Operations Manual (OM) informs crews on the company's policy regarding safety and all procedures to be followed. A clear understanding of a company's safety policy and procedures is essential for all concerned.

3 Discussion

- 3.1 Operators are required to document their flight preparation and planning procedures in their OMs. For EASA-OPS operators, this is covered by ORO.GEN.110, ORO.MLR.100 and 101 together with the associated Alternative Means of Compliance (AMC) and Guidance Material (GM). The means of compliance is comprehensive and details the kinds of subjects and information that must be provided so that flight operations can be planned and conducted safely whether under VFR or the Instrument Flight Rules (IFR). The OM procedures must of course meet the requirements detailed in EASA-OPS Part-CAT such as: commander's responsibilities; use of ATS; aerodromes and operating sites; routes and areas of operations; min flight altitudes; flight preparation; meteorological conditions. Similar requirements are also detailed in Part-NCC and Part-SPO.
- 3.2 Planning for IFR flights can be expected to be comprehensive but it is just as important that VFR flights, both by day and night, are afforded similar levels of attention. In considering this, it is perhaps relevant to review the changes made in this area by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for US Helicopter Emergency Medical Services (H)EMS operators, following a detailed review of these operations, as they may contain safety improvements that could also be relevant to wider commercial helicopter operations including those in the UK.
- 3.3 The Air Accident Investigation Branch (AAIB) noted in their report of the accident to the Agusta 109 G-CRST helicopter, that the US proposals relating to pre-flight risk assessment and Visual Flight Rules (VFR) flight planning are worthy of particular consideration in relation to:
- the decision to accept a flight;
 - continued operation in adverse weather conditions;
 - low level flight in the vicinity of terrain or obstacles; and
 - short notice or en-route changes to flight objectives and planning.
- 3.4 The pre-flight risk assessment is an effective tool to ensure a crew is properly prepared for a flight. Both air and ground stakeholders need to contribute to the risk assessment to ensure flight crew are furnished with all the necessary information to conduct their flight safely. Special attention needs to be applied to weather, obstacles en-route and high ground.
- 3.5 A process such as the European Helicopter Safety Team (EHST) Pre-departure Risk Assessment tool could make a positive safety impact because its use might prompt pilots to seek management approval before accepting a flight. This is an opportunity for discussion and joint assessment, which can highlight elevated risk factors and require risk-mitigating procedures to be put in place before departure. This tool and description for use may be found at the [EHST website](#) together with many other useful publications to improve safety - [EHST Pre-departure Risk Assessment Tool](#).
- 3.6 Additionally, EHST provides several Safety Management tools including the new "My Assessment of Risks for Incidents and Accidents" (MARIA) toolkit available for download at the EHST [Safety Management website](#).
- 3.7 Commercial pressure often sits behind many occurrences and it is essential that the operator's management system and operational control divorces the commander from this as much as possible. It would be appropriate for the commander to only have dialogue with the company operations department who should in turn be responsible for liaising with the customer before any flight.