



United States Department of the Interior
Office of Aviation Services
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DOI OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES MEMORANDUM (OPM) - 40

Subject: Single-Skid, Toe-In, and Hover Exit/Entry Procedures (STEP) Operations

Effective Date: January 1, 2026

Last Updated: June 24, 2024

Expiration Date: December 31, 2026

1. Summary of Changes:

The Executive Aviation Subcommittee (EAS) reviewed and concurred with the following changes.

- Updated instructor and pilot reporting requirements within the Interagency Aviation Training (IAT) database to capture the completion of training and clarified the number of training evolutions required to serve as an instructor.

- 2. Purpose:** This OPM establishes policy and operational procedures for training for the use of helicopter Single-skid, Toe-in and hover Exit/entry Procedures (STEP). This policy applies to DOI flight activities involving government aircrew members.

These training standards will be used to evaluate training plans required by procurement documents where the vendor is providing all personnel involved with single-skid, toe-in and hover exit/entry.

- 3. Authority.** This policy is established by the Director, Department of the Interior, Office of Aviation Services (OAS) in accordance with the provisions of Departmental Manual 112 DM 12 and 350 DM 1 and Secretarial Order 3322 August 23, 2012.

- 4. General.** The use of STEP maneuvers is driven by a variety of factors. These include terrain, slope, obstacles, wind, and vegetation coverage. In addition to environmental considerations, it is critical that the pilot performing these maneuvers be proficient.

There are three separate STEP maneuvers (for the purpose of this document, references to skids also apply to other helicopter landing gear configurations). As a result of rotorcraft flight manual or other aircraft limitations, some make/model helicopters cannot be used or may be unsuitable for one or more of the STEP maneuvers.

- A. Single-skid: One skid or a portion of one skid is in contact with the surface while the other skid is not in contact with the surface.
- B. Toe-in: The toes (forward portion of the skids) are in contact with the surface, while the aft portion of the skids are not in contact with the surface.
- C. Hover: The helicopter remains in a hover above the surface, at a height allowing the aircrew members to exit or enter safely.

5. **Policy.** OAS is responsible for the approval of aircraft and pilots. In partnership with the bureaus, OAS supports and provides training for the use of STEP maneuvers.
6. **Responsibilities.** The approval, use, and oversight of STEP maneuvers require an effective and collaborative working relationship between OAS and the bureaus.

A. Bureau Responsibilities.

National Office: Review and approve an operations plan and sign a letter of approval for the STEP request from the bureau's field office. A copy of this letter of approval will be provided to the OAS Regional Office in which the field office resides.

Field Offices:

- 1) Once a field office has the National Aviation Manager's approval to perform STEP, they will coordinate with the OAS Training Branch (TB) a minimum of 45 calendar days prior to the mission if training is being requested. This request for assistance will include a copy of the National Aviation Manager's signed letter of approval.
- 2) Field offices should notify their National Aviation Office and coordinate with OAS TB for final approval of bureau STEP instructor candidates.

B. Office of Aviation Services Responsibilities.

- 1) Once the National Aviation Manager's letter of approval is received, the OAS Regional Director will coordinate scheduling pilot(s) and aircraft approvals with the vendor as necessary.
- 2) If requested, the OAS TB will coordinate with the requesting field office to schedule training, obtain the STEP Operations Plan, and the risk assessment.
- 3) Coordinate within OAS offices/divisions as appropriate.
- 4) Issue approvals for aircraft and pilots.
- 5) Maintain a staff of qualified STEP instructors to provide training support and instructor certification as requested by the bureaus.

7. **Training.**

Successful completion will be documented and kept at the field office and must also be recorded in the IAT database.

A. STEP Crewmember

- 1) Prerequisites
Current as Aircrew Member per the IAT Guide.
- 2) Initial STEP Training
 - a) Personnel who have not been qualified as STEP crewmembers in the last three years must complete initial STEP training taught by a qualified STEP Instructor using the current version of the IAT STEP curriculum and training syllabus.
 - b) Must complete error free mock-ups for all maneuvers to be utilized.

c) Must complete STEP training evolutions (at least one entry and one exit) in terrain that is applicable to the maneuver, for all maneuvers to be utilized, until proficiency is achieved.

3) Refresher STEP Training

Qualified STEP crewmembers must complete refresher STEP training (or initial STEP Training) every 14 months.

Refresher STEP training will be taught by a qualified STEP instructor. This training must be documented in the employee's IAT records.

Refresher STEP training will include:

a) Classroom Content Review:

- (1) Policy: OPM-40 / approved STEP Operations Plan or Project Aviation Safety Plan (PASP)
- (2) PPE Requirements
- (3) Communications (Verbal / Hand signals)
- (4) In-flight Emergency Procedures
- (5) Litter Loading Procedures (if applicable)
- (6) Risk Assessment

b) Mock-ups until error free.

c) Training STEP evolutions (entries and exits) in terrain that is applicable to the maneuver until proficiency is achieved. Any of the STEP maneuvers that a STEP Crewmember is qualified for may be used.

4) Maintaining Currency

a) Maintain qualifications as Aircrew Member.

b) Perform at least one proficient STEP evolution (a STEP evolution is defined as: 1 entry and 1 exit in a training or currency scenario; or 1 entry or exit in an operational scenario) every 60 days. Any of the STEP maneuvers that a STEP crewmember is qualified for may be used.

c) A mock-up may be substituted for an operational or training STEP evolution every other currency cycle.

d) If currency is lost, mock-ups (until proficiency is achieved) and a minimum of 1 proficiency training STEP evolution (1 entry and 1 exit) must be completed before beginning operations.

5) Change in make/model or configuration* of aircraft: Each participant will perform error free mock-ups for each maneuver intended and for which they have been qualified.

*Refers to items such as hinged vs. sliding doors, cargo basket on or off, etc.

6) Change in pilot: Refer below to 9. C.

8. STEP Instructor

- A. Must be a qualified IAT instructor in accordance with OPM-04.
- B. Must have attended a minimum of three STEP trainings (one of which must be an initial training session) prior to the instructor evaluation.
- C. STEP Instructors maintain currency by teaching initial STEP training or refresher STEP training, at least once in a 36-month period.
- D. Instructors who have not met currency requirements must contact OAS and their Bureau National Aviation Office to initiate recertification.
- E. STEP instructors will coordinate with OAS TB to obtain the most current version of the IAT STEP curriculum and training syllabus.
- F. If not documented in the IAT system, STEP instructors will ensure that pilots who attend initial STEP training or refresher STEP training receive written documentation of that training. This documentation will be included in the pilot's IAT records.

9. STEP Pilot (Fleet or Vendor)

- A. Pilots must be approved for STEP operations in accordance with the Interagency Helicopter Pilot Practical Test Standards and procurement document, as applicable.
- B. Prior to flying any training or operational STEP evolutions, pilots must participate in the classroom portion of initial STEP training. Thereafter, the pilots must attend the classroom portion of either initial STEP training or refresher STEP training, at a minimum every three years. This training documentation must be included in the pilot's IAT records.
- C. Pilots must participate in mock-ups and flight training STEP evolution(s) for each crewmember flying with them.

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