

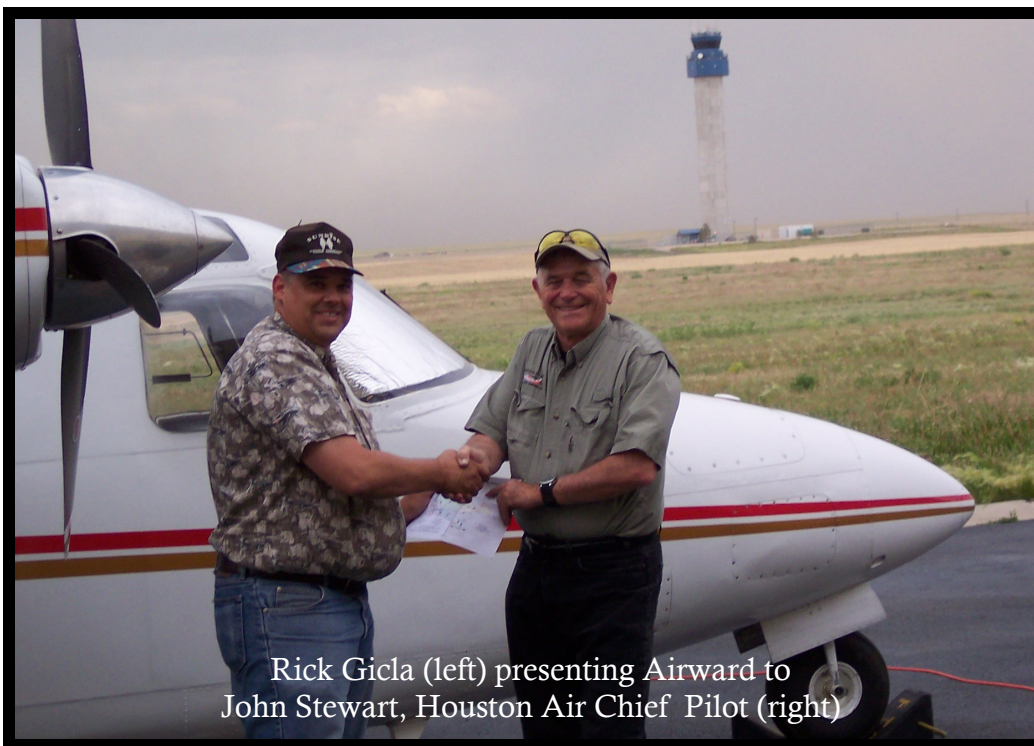


# AIRWARD NEWS

In Recognition of Professional Performance during a Hazardous Aviation Event or Significant Contribution to Aviation Mishap Prevention

## The Right Thing to Do

June 27, 2011, N93AA experienced an oil leak which necessitated a return to the airport very close to the end of their aerial supervision shift on the Duckett Incident. The pilot had been monitoring the instruments and noticed that the right engine oil pressure had fallen to an unsafe level; no rise in engine temperature was indicated. Immediately, the mission was aborted, and the pilot briefed the Air Tactical Group Supervisor (ATGS) on the issue. He also implemented crew resource management specific to the incident, delegating some instrument monitoring in order to concentrate more on flying the airplane. They landed without incident. Upon inspection, it was found that the vendor had enough remaining oil to legally flush the system, replace the oil and receive an endorsement from the Maintenance Inspector for a return to contract availability. The vendor chose not to go this route and requested to take the aircraft off contract and subject the engine to several hours of flight and other tests to ensure no damage resulted from the incident.



Rick Gicla (left) presenting Airward to John Stewart, Houston Air Chief Pilot (right)

For their continued practice of risk management and exemplary response to this incident, Houston Air is being recognized and posed as an example of a vendor not only satisfying their company commitment to safety, but their commitment to the safety culture that the United States Forest Service is actively promoting. [SAFECOM 11-520](#)

## Decision Making at it's BEST

The dynamic, fast paced fires of the 2011 spring fire season were a challenge for the management of aircraft. Matt Barker was the assigned HEB2 for the Trans Pecos Complex in Texas. During initial attack of the Schwartz Fire, Matt was moved with three Type-1 helicopters to Alpine to establish a new helibase. This helibase was very remote from ICP. The same day just west of Alpine, a fire broke threatening the town of Alpine. With the value of the many homes and the town threatened there was a sense of urgency.

Communications were a challenge due to multiple commands. Toward evening, having flown hard all day, both Air Attacks had timed out and had left the fires. With all the Type I helicopters either spooling up, or having just launched, Matt was suddenly put in the middle of a situation quickly becoming chaotic. Multiple directions from dispatch centers, conflicting requests from multiple ICs combined with poor communication could have flustered even the most seasoned Helibase Managers. Matt had the presence of mind to provide first for the safe separation of aircraft, asking in-flight helicopters to orbit in a safe area until instructions could be confirmed.

At the end of the shift, Matt's detailed description of how communication and dispatch procedures had developed through the day led us in Air Ops at the Complex's ICP to better define and improve our dispatch procedures. All who participate in Air Operations, regardless of their level must provide above all else the safety of the aircraft and personnel. Everyone must also have the courage to move back up the line with feedback as to how we can improve our procedures. Matt did an excellent job exhibiting such skills thru decisive action and communication. Matt is a HEB1(T) and he will excel at any level he chooses to participate. He is the type of manager we need to culture in Air Operations and should be an example for us all. No SAFECOM Submitted.



## Towering to New Safety Heights

Personnel at the Libby Army Airfield Base Operations went above and beyond to promote aviation safety through air traffic control on the Monument Fire. They granted firefighting aircraft privileges by holding all arriving and departing traffic to allow Type 1 helicopters to approach, fill and depart from a mobile retardant tank located on the airfield. With a heavy helicopter helibase, an airtanker base and several Air Tactical Group Supervisor (ATGS) platforms, Libby Army Airfield Operations had quite a bit of fire traffic to deal with in addition to their regular workload. There were several instances where military and civilian traffic were kept in a holding pattern until firefighting resources could accomplish their mission safely. The Libby Field Base Operations staff was professional and really added to the level of aviation safety. Kudos to each member of the group. No SAFECOM Submitted.



From left to right: Steven Pezold, Anthony Barnes, Samson Polkinghorn (sitting), Marcianne Barker, George Bennett (Tower Chief), and Katherine Hess

## Making a Difference

It's always important to recognize those who support us quietly via consistent daily professionalism, dedication, and vigilance which often results in getting the job done in a safe and effective manner. Recognizing significant moments when disaster is skillfully averted occurs often and effortlessly however, it's imperative to provide similar recognition to those who successfully prevent such thrilling moments by their consistent performance throughout their career. Billy Shirley has distinguished himself as a consummate professional whose consistent performance is unsurpassed.

In the past six years Billy has supported the Department of the Interior as a mechanic with Guardian Helicopter to which he has earned a reputation of performing above and beyond his job description in order to make flying safer. Several professionals have noted his thoroughness and attention to detail that provides an additional level of safety which improves the Department's ability to perform its missions more effectively. Examples of his natural aptitude for this type of work include detecting a crack on a rear-stabilizer during a routine waxing and noticing an abnormal engine sound of another aircraft while performing other duties. Even more impressive is Billy's willingness to take the required action that invokes safety by making difficult decisions to remove an aircraft from availability despite the financial repercussions it imposes on his company. Billy has consistently demonstrated his commitment to safety by taking the time to ensure aircraft are truly airworthy and safe to fly. Billy Shirley is committed to excellence by going the extra mile and ensuring the correct repair is completed the first time which ultimately enhances everyone's safety. His efforts have won the admiration and respect of his co-workers.



Phil DiFiore, Guardian Helicopters (right) accepting Airward for Billy Shirley from Tom Sherman (left)

Congratulations Billy on this fine achievement of persistent excellence. The Department of the Interior is proud to present you with this Airward. Keep up the good work! No SAFECOM Submitted.

## High Skills Set the Tone During High Stress

While transitioning into position as the incoming Air Tactical (ATGS) platform, pilot Doug Atwell and his passenger experienced a high stress event. The airplane Doug was piloting was suddenly faced with another airplane in an airspace close call. Doug's high level of airmanship and professionalism were demonstrated as he immediately responded to the situation and avoided the collision. His attention to flying and commitment to aviation safety set an example for others in a very busy fire season. Kudos to Doug

for responding to an unexpected high risk situation by making good risk decisions and bringing his aircraft and the persons onboard home safely. [SAFECOM 11-0396](#)



Doug Atwell (left) receiving Airward from Jami Anzalone

## Communication Sets the Tone



While conducting water dropping operations on the Monument Fire, Brian Jensen displayed extreme professionalism and airmanship that set an example for other pilots. Brian's communication skills and management style in a very complex airspace helped to set a tone that promoted safe efficient aviation in the crowded Fire Traffic Area (FTA). Brian assessed his own bucket effectiveness in the situation and volunteered to shut down to relieve congested airspace and allow other aircraft to become more effective. Brian's commitment to aviation safety is commended. No SAFECOM Submitted.

## “See Something, say Something”

While assigned to the Constantia Complex Fire on the Bureau of Land Management Carson City District, Bonneville Hotshot Crew members Dan Stucki and Scott Schmidt were engaged in a longline cargo backhaul operation. During a longline evolution, they observed the helicopter maneuver into the sling site with an attached 100 foot Kevlar longline. As it was hovering into position, they noticed the longline had looped over the ground resonance stabilizer on the tail of the left skid, most likely due to a combination of the aircraft’s flight profile and the light weight of the synthetic longline. Recognizing the potential hazard of this situation, they immediately notified the pilot who was able to free the line in flight.

Maintaining situational awareness requires effort and dedication. These two professional’s assertive action successfully mitigated a potentially deadly situation by taking responsibility and calmly alerting the pilot about what they had observed. Their attention to detail and making the appropriate response provides an example for others to glean. The 2010 Fire Refresher included a theme entitled “See Something, Say Something”. These two professionals were obviously paying attention. Congratulations on a job well done! [SAFECOM 10-0528](#)

## Safety is Everyone’s Responsibility

Firefighter Don Mitchell knows that safety is his responsibility. On April 30, 2011 a firefighting helicopter was dispatched to conduct water bucket drops on the Tree House Fire under the operational control of the National Park Service. As a firefighter on the ground, Mitchell heard a whistling sound emanating from the helicopter above. Rather than ignoring what he heard or keeping the information to himself, Mitchell informed the pilot of the suspicious noise and subsequently broke the chain of events that could have resulted in a mishap by unveiling an important safety issue.

Mitchell’s assertiveness resulted in the pilot cancelling his mission and landing the helicopter at a nearby helibase. The helicopter manager and the mechanic were notified of the situation and began an inspection of the aircraft. During the inspection, the mechanic discovered that the abrasion strips on the leading edge of the main rotor blades were close to their delamination limits and required replacement. This positive series of events resulted in replacing a critical flight component prior to structural failure which ultimately averted a mishap by ensuring the aircraft was restored to an airworthy condition.

Don Mitchell has always been interested in aviation and in 2009 he returned to Fort Washakie as the Helicopter Crew Supervisor for the BIA Wind River Agency.

DOI and the aircraft owner are thankful to the firefighter for speaking up when he did. Don’s experience in fire and aviation has made him an asset to DOI and sets an example for others to follow. [SAFECOM 11-0223](#)



## The Importance of Communication

On July 19th Charlie Miller was on return flight to Hill Air Force Base for a load and return to the Goose Nest fire near Salt Lake when he lost all radio communications in his SEAT aircraft while in Class B airspace.

Charlie maintained control of the aircraft and rapidly diagnosed the emergency while in complex airspace. He exhibited outstanding decision making by discontinuing his course through Class B airspace without radio communication and landing at Brigham (BMC) airport, just north of Salt Lake. After safely landing the aircraft, Charlie made all of the required notifications to the appropriate agencies.

Charlie continued to troubleshoot the malfunction in order to return the aircraft to service as soon as possible while minimizing the time lost supporting the fire suppression efforts. During his investigation of the aircraft systems, he discovered that the master breaker had tripped. Charlie then reset the breaker, started the airplane, and performed various systems checks to determine if the malfunction would reappear. After running the aircraft for a significant amount of time, he was



Charlie Miller (left) receiving Airward from Kirk Rothwell

unable to recreate the malfunction. Charlie wisely contacted a certified aircraft mechanic and it was decided the prudent decision was to replace the breaker with a new one. After replacing the breaker, the mechanic load tested the system again without any negative results. All electrical equipment was inspected for damage and the aircraft was placed back in service.

Charlie took a very proactive approach towards mishap prevention by submitting a SAFECOM in a timely fashion and conducting an After Action Review (AAR) with all contractors and Cedar City Air Center personnel. His open and honest candor allowed him to successfully communicate his thoughts, concerns, decision processes, and follow up procedures with the entire audience. Charlie's efforts contributed to aviation safety by dedicating the time and energy to document the events and communicate the lessons learned so that others would benefit. [SAFECOM 11-0679](#)

## In the Right Place at the Right Time with the Right Pilots

On June 21, 2010, Tanker 21 Pilot Steve Maxwell and Co-pilot Gary Thomas made an in-flight decision that placed the needs of others ahead of their own. Their decision prevented a forest fire from spreading out of control and destroying several homes in the area. Their actions garnered heartfelt thanks from the Northern Saguache County Fire Protection District who greatly appreciated Tanker 21's initiative in reporting a new fire start and obtaining permission to perform the initial attack.

Tanker 21 was en-route from Durango to the Parkdale Fire when the pilots noticed a new fire start near the town of Bonanza, Colorado. There were several homes in the area that bordered federal land, and it would take an estimated 20-30 minutes for ground crews to arrive on scene. The fire was rapidly approaching an extreme amount of dead and dry fuels where winds could have easily taken it toward the nearby homes, placing its occupants in severe danger. Tanker 21 was under no obligation to provide any assistance and could have simply continued on its assigned mission. Instead, the pilots took it upon themselves to report the fire to the Pueblo Dispatch Center and volunteered to assist in attacking it. Their subsequent retardant drops were reported to be surgically accurate extinguishing the flames. Their success in controlling the fire within the tree tops allowed ground crews to build a fire line and control the fire from below. Through their combined efforts, the fire was contained to a one acre area and no homes were lost.

The Northern Saguache County Fire Protection District Chief and the local forest service engine supervisor stated that without Tanker 21's initiative, that fire would have grown and been well out of control.

The Department of the Interior is proud to recognize the outstanding efforts of these two pilots that significantly contributed to the saving of lives and property. Congratulations on a job well done!



Steve Maxwell (left) and Gary Thomas (right)



## Crew Resource Management in Action

On May 28, 2011 Don Bell and Scott Dewitz were dispatched as an ASM (Aerial Supervision Module) from Redmond, OR to a wildfire in Arizona. While en route, the aircraft's right engine experienced low oil pressure and high oil temperature that required them to shut the engine down in order to prevent damage to the engine and the aircraft. Don quickly assessed the situation and initiated a precautionary engine shut down while selecting an appropriate landing site that avoided the nearby rising terrain. Both exhibited outstanding Crew Resource Management (CRM) as Scott assisted with communications, checklists, navigational charts and maps and Don notified Air Traffic Control of their situation and began a descent towards the airfield.

If matters weren't challenging enough, conditions required a single-engine descent through the clouds where they encountered icing and moderate turbulence. Don's superb piloting skills and Scott's professionalism as an air crewman were keys to their successful single-engine instrument approach in actual Instrument Metrological Conditions to Winnemucca, Nevada.

Don and Scott's exceptional flight preparation and consummate professionalism afforded a successful outcome to a challenging situation where the end result was anything but certain. Their application of CRM principles throughout the event serves as a prime example of how well a professional and prepared aircrew can operate under stressful circumstances. Don and Scott's ability to work as a team along with their composure, skill, and professionalism is what every aircrew should strive for.

Congratulations to a truly dynamic duo! [SAFECOM 11-0321](#)



From left to right: Mary Verry, Scott Dewitz, Don Bell, and Kurt Kliener

## Passion for Safety

Tandy Jenkins from the Cleveland NF developed an Air Tanker Base Watchout Power Point Presentation. This power point presentation trains air base personnel on known hazards associated with working at tanker bases. The Airtanker Base Watchout Powerpoint was distributed nationwide for safety training and accident prevention purposes. Thank you, Tandy, for having the passion for air tanker base safety. No SAFECOM submitted.



## WAT Chart?



Sean Cox and Brian Thompson are part of the Large Fire Support Program on the Lassen National Forest. Brian identified an issue with Weight, Altitude and Temperature (WAT) charts and their usage on medium helicopters. Sean pushed this concern to the Regional level due to his concerns about WAT charts being used incorrectly and affecting aircraft weight safety margins. Together, Sean and Brian's actions resulted in the development and issuance of a nationwide technical bulletin explaining the correct use of WAT charts. No SAFECOM submitted. [IATB IA 2011-03](#)

Yolanda Saldana (left) presenting Sean Cox (right) with Airward. Bryan Thompson (not pictured)

## Risk Management in Action

Helicopter 523 was dispatched last fire season and during size up of the fire the aircraft encountered strong and erratic winds. The decision was made to land in a safe area and wait until the winds subsided. The crew also advised other incoming aircraft of the situation and to stay away. Lesson Learned— Good job to the aircraft crew in quickly recognizing their situation and making a decision to wait and sharing the situation with other aircraft. [SAFECOM11-0320](#)



Helicopter 523 Crew

## Cool Head

On September 26, 2011 Helicopter Manager Christy Bullard and Pilot Jared Rader flew to a ridge line outside Juneau Alaska to pick up two passengers who were in the final stages of installing a remote weather station. The passengers were not ready when the helicopter arrived so a decision was made to shut down and wait. During the cool down process, the AS350B2 helicopter lifted and turned onto its left side totally destroying the aircraft. The accident is currently under investigation.

This Airward recognizes the cool headed actions of Christy Bullard who checked on the physical status of the pilot, herself, and then facilitated egress for them both. She then performed a situational assessment, acquired a radio from the field crew because her handheld was in the cargo compartment on the left side, tried to make a radio call, but ended up using a cell phone to make notifications, then helped the FAO coordinate the rescue flight. She then initiated evidence preservation measures to aid in the investigation and continued to cover her responsibilities as a helicopter manager during the crew recovery. Her actions are a credit to her professionalism, abilities, experience and training. When faced with an extremely stressful situation, her thoughts were for the safety of the crew, necessary notifications, and subsequent actions to get everyone back to base safely. [SAFECOM 11-1038](#)



Forrest Cole (left), Christy Bullard (center) and Patricia O'Connor (right)

## Sharing their Experience and Knowledge

The crew from Bald Mountain Helitack recognized the hazards associated with higher than normal flow rate of rivers and streams. The crew was convinced and correct in their assessment that this was a national concern, as most regions experienced high snow pack run-off. Because of their determination an Interagency Aviation Accident Prevention Bulletin was developed and issued. [SAFECOM 11-0508](#) and [IAAPB 11-04](#)



**Aviation Safety Offices**

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