

No. 99-01

Subject:

Helicopter Snow Operations

Distribution:

All DOI Aviation Activities

Discussion:

During helicopter snow operations, the pilot and passengers must be familiar with the Do's and Don'ts to safely and successfully complete each project. Managers can mitigate the risk associated with accidents by conducting advanced planning and attending annual Aviation Safety Training.

DOI aviation managers are encouraged to develop procedures that will assist in project planning and to become familiar with the hazards unique to snow operations. Suggested items to include in your project planning are:

Requirements:

1. 352 DM 1.9 outlines the requirements for special use project planning.
2. File a flight plan in accordance with OPM 99-2 and be specific (Lat/Long coordinates) about the area or sites to be visited.
3. Flight follow in accordance with OPM 99-2. If the bureau does not have a radio communications network, plan to use another bureau/federal or state agency network and include it in the project plan.
4. Ensure that aircraft performance planning and load calculations have been completed for each mission. Ask the pilot to explain the performance charts and load calculations to you.

Recommendations:

1. Include the proposed vendor and pilot in the project planning process.
2. Attend annual Basic Helicopter Safety training and view the "Helicopter Snow Operations" video available from OAS Training. Include the proposed vendor if possible.
3. During operations:
 - a. Do not rush the pilot.
 - b. Carry enough equipment and be prepared to remain overnight.
 - c. Be aware that "WARM BODIES + A COLD CABIN = WINDOW FOGGING." Do not be in a hurry to takeoff. Allow enough time to defog the windows or determine if the windows are going to fog over after loading passengers.
 - d. Shut the helicopter down prior to loading/unloading, if at all possible. It could be catastrophic if the helicopter settled in the snow with the blades turning and personnel are near the helicopter.
 - e. While exiting the aircraft, step off of the aircraft well clear of the skids. It is possible to weaken the surface near the skid to cause further settling or breakthrough on crusted snow.
 - f. Assess the landing environment for possible "whiteout" conditions during landing. Prepare for egress from poor visibility.

If you have any questions regarding this subject, please call your OAS Area/Regional office:

Alaska Regional Office (Anchorage) 907-271-3700
East Area Office (Atlanta) 770-458-7474

West Area Office (Boise) 208-334-9310
West Area Office (Phoenix) 602-640-2633

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