



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Office of the Administrator

800 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20591

May 16, 2017

The Honorable John Thune
Chairman, Committee on
Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As required by Public Law 112-95, the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 (the Act), Section 306, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is pleased to provide the enclosed report on Safety of Air Ambulance Operations.

The Act directs the FAA to submit a report to Congress containing a summary of the data collected on helicopter air ambulance operations. In order to do so, FAA was required to complete an application to the Office of Management and Budget to collect data as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act.

This report is the FAA's first submission under the Act and it contains a summary of the data collected by the FAA from helicopter air ambulance operators from April 1, 2015, to December 31, 2015.

We have sent identical letters to Chairman Shuster, Senator Nelson, and Congressman DeFazio.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael P. Huerta", with a circular flourish at the end.

Michael P. Huerta
Administrator

Enclosure



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**Federal Aviation
Administration**

May 16, 2017

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Ranking Member, Committee on
Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Nelson:

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We have sent identical letters to Chairmen Thune and Shuster and Congressman DeFazio.

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Michael P. Huerta
Administrator

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May 16, 2017

The Honorable Bill Shuster
Chairman, Committee on
Transportation and Infrastructure
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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Administrator

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Washington, D.C. 20591

May 16, 2017

The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio
Ranking Member, Committee on
Transportation and Infrastructure
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman DeFazio:

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Administrator

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Report to Congress
Safety of Air Ambulance Operations



FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012

Pub. L. No. 112-95—Section 306

I. Introduction

Section 306 of the Federal Aviation Administration Modernization and Reform Act of 2012, Pub. L. No. 112-95 (FMRA or the Act) amended Title 49 of the United States Code (49 U.S.C.) to add a new section 41731 which mandated new reporting requirements for helicopter air ambulance (HAA) operators. This provision requires each operator conducting HAA operations to submit annual reports to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) that include the following:

1. The number of helicopters that the certificate holder uses to provide helicopter air ambulance services and the base locations of the helicopters;
2. The number of flights and hours flown, by registration number, during which helicopters operated by the certificate holder were providing helicopter air ambulance services;
3. The number of flight requests for a helicopter providing air ambulance services that were accepted or declined by the certificate holder and the type of each such flight request (such as scene response, interfacility transport, organ transport, or ferry or repositioning flight);
4. The number of accidents, if any, involving helicopters operated by the certificate holder while providing air ambulance services and a description of the accidents;
5. The number of flights and hours flown under instrument flight rules by helicopters operated by the certificate holder while providing air ambulance services;
6. The time of day of each flight flown by helicopters operated by the certificate holder while providing air ambulance services; and
7. The number of incidents, if any, in which a helicopter was not directly dispatched and arrived to transport patients but was not utilized for patient transport.

Section 44731(d) also requires the FAA to submit a report to Congress containing a summary of the data collected from HAA operators no later than 2 years after the date of enactment and annually thereafter. In order to do so, FAA was required to complete an application to the Office of Management and Budget to collect data as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA).

The FAA published its initial Federal Register Notice on July 31, 2013, (78 FR 46405) with correction published August 12, 2013 (78 FR 48925). Following the 60-day public comment period and disposition of comments, the FAA published the final Notice for PRA approval with a 30-day comment period on July 29, 2014, (79 FR 44083) and collected data from April 1, 2015, through December 31, 2015.

This report is the FAA's first submission under Section 44731(d), and it contains a summary of the data collected by the FAA from HAA operators from April 1, 2015 through December 31, 2015.

To protect proprietary information, data collected from each operator has been de-identified. Therefore, the identity of certificate holders, aircraft bases of operations, and registration

numbers of helicopters engaging in air ambulance operations has been encoded. The seven requests of section 44731 and the responses are delineated below:

II. Summary of Data Collected Under 49 U.S.C. § 44731 (Apr. 2015 – Dec. 2015)

1. Report the number of helicopters that the certificate holder uses to provide helicopter air ambulance services and the base locations of the helicopters:
 - The total number of helicopters each certificate holder operates in HAA service is 1,238. Of the 67 reporting operators, 51 operated between 1 and 9 helicopters; 12 operated between 10 and 99 helicopters; and 4 operated more than 100 helicopters. For multi-helicopter operators who provide HAA services, it was evenly split that some reported base locations of the helicopters in one state only while some reported base locations in multiple states. The only states where certificate holders who provide HAA services did not report base locations of the helicopters were Rhode Island and Vermont.
2. Report the number of flights and hours flown, by registration number, during which helicopters operated by the certificate holder were providing helicopter air ambulance services.
 - For the 67 reporting operators, the number of flights and the hours flown for each helicopter operated in HAA service by certificate holder varied tremendously. For instance, one operator with three helicopters that the certificate holder uses to provide HAA services reported zero flights and zero hours flown for the reporting period, while another operator also with three helicopters that the certificate holder uses to provide HAA services reported 2,901 flights and 1,426.8 hours flown. Overall, the operators reported an average of 636 flights and 323.3 hours flown.
3. Report the number of flight requests for a helicopter providing air ambulance services that were accepted or declined by the certificate holder and the type of each such flight request (such as scene response, interfacility transport, organ transport, or ferry or repositioning flight).
 - A summary of the flights accepted/declined for the respective types of requests is delineated in the table below:

SCENE RESPONSE	173,093	SCENE RESPONSE	46,785
INTERFACILITY	285,810	INTER FACILITY	76,769
ORGAN TRANSPORT	1,094	ORGAN TRANSPORT	144
REPOSITION	40,135	REPOSITION	274
FERRY	7,481	FERRY	14

4. Provide the number of accidents, if any, involving helicopters operated by the certificate holder while providing air ambulance services and a description of the accidents.
 - Nine accidents involving HAA operations were reported for this period, six of which were conducted as Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR) part 135 HAA

flights as defined in 14 CFR § 135.601. A summary of these six accidents involving HAA services is provided verbatim from the operators' posted reports in Appendix A of this report.

5. Report the number of flights and hours flown under instrument flight rules by helicopters operated by the certificate holder while providing air ambulance services.
 - For the 67 reporting operators, 39 reported zero flights and zero hours flown under instrument flight rules. For the remaining 28 operators, there was an average of 203 flights and 140 hours flown under instrument flight rules by the certificate holder while providing air ambulance services.

6. Report the time of day of each flight flown by helicopters operated by the certificate holder while providing air ambulance services.
 - The aggregate number of HAA flights initiated by all operators broken down by each 1 hour segment of the day is delineated in the table below:

DEPARTURE	FLIGHTS	DEPARTURE	FLIGHTS
00:00 - 00:59	28,006	12:00 - 12:59	35,842
01:00 - 01:59	25,470	13:00 - 13:59	39,004
02:00 - 02:59	23,393	14:00 - 14:59	41,328
03:00 - 03:59	20,067	15:00 - 15:59	43,349
04:00 - 04:59	17,806	16:00 - 16:59	44,661
05:00 - 05:59	16,276	17:00 - 17:59	45,921
06:00 - 06:59	16,704	18:00 - 18:59	48,511
07:00 - 07:59	20,273	19:00 - 19:59	46,343
08:00 - 08:59	24,636	20:00 - 20:59	43,232
09:00 - 09:59	28,661	21:00 - 21:59	40,738
10:00 - 10:59	32,195	22:00 - 22:59	36,416
11:00 - 11:59	33,766	23:00 - 23:59	32,250

7. Report the number of incidents, if any, in which a helicopter was not directly dispatched and arrived to transport patients, but was not utilized for patient transport.
 - The 67 reporting operators cited 4,692 incidents in which a helicopter was not directly dispatched and arrived to transport patients but was not utilized for patient transport.

APPENDIX A
HAA Accident Summaries
Report Requirement #4

Company ID	Number Accidents	Accident Description
HAA2015003	1	<p>On November 2, 2015, at 1923 central standard time, a Bell 407 made a forced landing at San Antonio International Airport (KSAT), San Antonio, Texas. The pilot, flight nurse, and paramedic were not injured. The helicopter was substantially damaged. The helicopter was registered to and operated by Air Evac EMS, Inc., O'Fallon, Missouri, under the provisions of 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 135 as an on-demand air taxi flight. Night visual meteorological conditions prevailed at the time of the accident, and no flight plan had been filed. The flight was originating from KSAT, and was destined for Northeast Methodist Hospital (XS83), San Antonio</p>
HAA2015004	1	<p>Controlled Flight Into Terrain, Dark night visual meteorological conditions.</p>
HAA2015008	1	<p>After liftoff during a helicopter emergency medical service (HEMS) flight with a patient on board, the HEMS pilot brought it in to a 1 to 2 foot hover and was preparing to make a right pedal turn into the wind, when a cover from a wheeled fire extinguisher, was blown airborne by the main rotor wash and ingested into the tail rotor (Fenestron) of the helicopter. The helicopter lost tail rotor authority and began to spin clockwise. The pilot lowered the collective and the helicopter rotated approximately 150 degrees, then impacted the ground and continued to rotate another 20 to 30 degrees, for a total of 170 to 180 degree turn, and came to rest. Examination of the helicopter by a FAA inspector revealed damage to the landing gear skid tubes, Fenestron composite housing, and the forward cross tube gimbals which had pushed up into a composite non-structural area of the fuselage. It was discovered, that the wheeled fire extinguisher that the cover had blown off of, had been inspected for serviceability just four days prior to the accident.</p>
HAA2015027	1	<p>Day VMC -On December 15, 2015, about 1723 mountain standard time, an Airbus helicopter, AS350B3, N74317, was substantially damaged when it impacted terrain while maneuvering near Superior, Arizona. The HAA was registered to Air Methods Corporation and was doing business as Native Air Ambulance, under the provisions of Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 135. The commercial pilot, and flight nurse sustained fatal injuries and the flight paramedic sustained serious injuries. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed and a company visual flight rules (VFR) flight plan was filed for the flight. The cross-country positioning flight originated from the Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport (IWA), Mesa, Arizona, at 1705 with an intended destination of Globe, Arizona.</p> <p>According to the operator, the helicopter had transported a patient from the Cobre Valley Community Hospital, Globe, Arizona to the Baywood Heart Hospital, in Mesa, Arizona. The flight originated from their base in Globe, Arizona with a planned return to their base at the conclusion of the operation. After transporting</p>

		<p>the patient, the helicopter was repositioned to IWA for refueling. It subsequently departed IWA for the return flight to its base in Globe. The flight was being tracked by satellite at the company's national communication center in Omaha, Nebraska. The company's operations control center (OCC), located in Denver, Colorado, was monitoring the flight on their Flight Management System. At 1723 mountain standard time, satellite tracking of the helicopter was lost. The communications center notified the OCC and a search was conducted by a company aircraft. The wreckage was located as a result of an aerial search at about 2054.</p> <p>Examination of the accident site revealed that the helicopter impacted mountainous terrain about 10 miles north-northwest of Superior, Arizona. All major structural components of the helicopter were located within the wreckage debris path, which was about 380 feet in length, and oriented on a heading of about 200 degrees magnetic. The wreckage was recovered to a secure location for further examination.</p>
HAA2015062	1	<p>On December 10, 2015, about 1908 Pacific standard time, a Bell 407, N408FC, was destroyed when it impacted terrain during cruise flight near McFarland, California. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed and a company visual flight rules (VFR) flight plan was filed for the flight. The cross-country flight originated from the Porterville Municipal Airport, Porterville, California, at 1851 with an intended destination of the San Joaquin Memorial Hospital, Bakersfield, California. Pilot had flown approximately 2 hours that day, not NVG qualified, 4 people onboard.</p>
HAA2015066	1	<p>Date: 11/19/2015. Type of flight - 14CFR135 Passenger flight. FOD ingestion into tail rotor assembly causing damage to tail rotor blades, hub assembly and Fenestron.</p>