

NOTICE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

N 8900.353

National Policy

Effective Date:
3/16/16

Cancellation Date:
3/16/17

SUBJ: OpSpec A021, Helicopter Air Ambulance (HAA) Operations

1. Purpose of This Notice. This notice announces changes to operations specification (OpSpec) A021 and implementation of guidance for operations under Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR) part 135.

2. Audience. The primary audience for this notice is certificate-holding district offices (CHDO), principal inspectors (PI), and aviation safety inspectors (ASI) who hold certificate oversight responsibility for part 135 helicopter air ambulance (HAA) operators. The secondary audience includes Flight Standards Service (AFS) divisions and branches in the regions and in headquarters (HQ).

3. Where You Can Find This Notice. You can find this notice on the MyFAA employee Web site at https://employees.faa.gov/tools_resources/orders_notices. Inspectors can access this notice through the Flight Standards Information Management System (FSIMS) at <http://fsims.avs.faa.gov>. Operators can find this notice on the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Web site at <http://fsims.faa.gov>. The public can find this notice at http://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/orders_notices.

4. Background.

a. General. On February 21, 2014, to address an increase in fatal HAA accidents, the FAA implemented a comprehensive package of regulatory updates which included the addition of several new sections to 14 CFR parts 91, 120, and 135. These rules can be accessed at http://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/rulemaking/recently_published/.

b. OpSpec Paragraph A021. In addition to safety-increasing procedures and additional equipment requirements for HAA operations, the rule change also made provisions allowing HAA aircraft to operate under instrument flight rules (IFR) at locations without weather reporting if authorized by the Administrator. Provisions for this type of authorization were formerly contained in OpSpec paragraph A021; however, with the adoption of the new rules the provisions were inadvertently removed from that paragraph. This change to the paragraph adds the authorization back into OpSpec paragraph A021j by adding the verbiage, "The certificate holder, if authorized to conduct helicopter air ambulance (HAA) operations under IFR, is authorized to conduct those operations under the provisions of § 135.611."

5. Guidance. Part 135, § 135.611 allows authorized HAA operators to conduct IFR approaches and departures from landing sites which do not provide current weather observations. It provides for nearby approved alternative current weather sources within 15 miles of the site of intended landing, and alternatively, use of appropriate National Weather Service (NWS)-approved forecasts to determine if landing minimums will be available. In addition, § 135.611 requires the operator to select IFR alternate airports based upon weather requirements contained in § 135.221 and § 135.223, and provides for the pilot in command (PIC) to make weather observations from the ground at sites without weather reporting for the purpose of meeting part 97 takeoff requirements or § 135.609 HAA-specific Class G visual flight rules (VFR) weather minima. A sample of the revised OpSpec A021 is contained in Appendix A along with instructions for authorizations which apply specifically to part 135 HAA certificate holders.

6. Action. The authorization to use the provisions of § 135.611 is contained in the revised OpSpec paragraph A021. Within 30 days from the effective date of this notice, principal operations inspectors (POI) should evaluate the certificate holder's approved training and checking program to ensure this subject matter is adequately covered. Once the evaluation is completed, PIs should then reissue OpSpec A021.

7. Disposition. We will incorporate the information in this notice into FAA Order 8900.1 within the next six months. Direct your questions or comments concerning this notice to the Part 135 Air Carrier Operations Branch (AFS-250) at 202-267-8166.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Barbagallo". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

John Barbagallo
Deputy Director, Flight Standards Service

Appendix A. Sample OpSpec A021, Helicopter Air Ambulance (HAA) Operations: 14 CFR Part 135

a. The certificate holder is authorized to conduct helicopter air ambulance (HAA) operations in accordance with 14 CFR part 135 and this operations specification.

NOTE: Helicopter air ambulance (HAA) was previously known as Helicopter Emergency Medical Evacuation Services (HEMS or HEMES). These terms are used interchangeably.

b. Off Airport / Off Heliport Takeoff and Landing Operations. The certificate holder is authorized to conduct off airport / off heliport takeoff and landing operations provided the site to be used is adequate for the proposed operation. The certificate holder will consider the size, type of surface, surrounding obstructions, and if applicable, lighting. During night operations, lighting sources must provide adequate illumination of the takeoff/landing area and of any obstructions that may create potential hazards during approach, hovering, taxiing, and departure operations.

c. HAA-Specific Flightcrew Member Training. The flightcrew must satisfactorily complete the certificate holder's approved training program prior to commencing HAA flights.

d. Local Flying Areas. The certificate holder is authorized to designate, and following FAA acceptance, to use the local flying areas listed in Table 1 below. Local flying areas allow qualified pilots to use lower VFR operating minima depicted in § 135.609. Local flying areas must meet the criteria contained in § 135.609:

(1) Local flying areas may be any shape but must not exceed 50 nautical miles from any single point designated by the certificate holder.

(2) Local flying areas need not be contiguous; however, any flight outside a local flying area must be operated in accordance with the non-local area minima depicted in § 135.609.

(3) Pilots may be qualified for more than one local flying area. Pilots who have not passed a knowledge test on a particular local flying area within the previous 12 calendar-months, regardless of operational experience in that area or Helicopter Terrain Awareness and Warning System (HTAWS) or Night Vision Imaging System (NVIS) qualification, must use the non-local area minima depicted in § 135.609 when operating in that area.

Table 1 – Authorized HAA Operations

Local Flying Area Base	Description	Coordinating Geographic FSDO (if outside the CHDO District)

e. Medical Personnel Training. The certificate holder is authorized to conduct FAA-approved medical personnel safety training and checking in accordance with § 135.621(b). Medical personnel who have successfully completed this training and checking within the past 24 calendar-months are exempt from preflight safety briefings to the extent defined by the certificate holder.

f. Flight Data Monitoring System (FDMS). The certificate holder is prohibited from conducting HAA flight operations with helicopters not equipped with approved FDMS after April 23, 2018 per § 135.607.

g. Operational Helicopter Terrain Awareness and Warning System (HTAWS). The certificate holder is prohibited from operating a helicopter in HAA operations after April 24, 2017 unless the helicopter is equipped with an approved HTAWS, rotorcraft flight manuals are amended, and personnel are compliant with all aspects of § 135.605.

h. Operations Control Center (OCC). *Select one from the following three options:*

Select the first radio button option if the certificate holder has 9 or fewer helicopters eligible for HAA operations and is NOT required to implement an Operations Control Center (OCC).

h. Operations Control Center. In accordance with § 135.619, an Operations Control Center is not required. The certificate holder is prohibited from operating more than 9 HAA helicopters after April 22, 2016.

Select the second radio button option if the certificate holder has 10 or more helicopters eligible for HAA operations and has not yet implemented an OCC.

h. Operations Control Center. The certificate holder operates 10 or more helicopters eligible for HAA operations and is prohibited from engaging in HAA operations after April 22, 2016 unless an Operations Control Center compliant in all respects with § 135.619(a)-(h) has been implemented.

Select the third radio button option if the certificate holder has 10 or more helicopters eligible for HAA operations and has implemented an OCC.

h. Operations Control Center. The certificate holder is authorized to operate 10 or more helicopters eligible for HAA operations providing it adequately staffs and operates an Operations Control Center compliant in all respects with § 135.619(a)-(h).

i. Class G VFR Ceiling and Visibility Minima Relief. *Select one from the following four options:*

Select the first radio button option when the certificate holder may apply relief from Class G night minima based on the use of NVIS.

i. Class G VFR Ceiling and Visibility Minima Relief. The certificate holder may, at their discretion, apply § 135.609 NVIS Class G VFR ceiling and visibility minima when the helicopter is properly certificated for NVIS and the flightcrew is compliant in all respects with A050.

Select the second radio button option when the certificate holder may apply relief from Class G night minima based on the use of HTAWS.

i. Class G VFR Ceiling and Visibility Minima Relief. The certificate holder may, at their discretion, apply § 135.609 HTAWS Class G VFR ceiling and visibility minima when the helicopter is equipped with operational HTAWS.

Select the third radio button option when the certificate holder may apply relief from Class G night minima based on the use of either NVIS or HTAWS.

i. Class G VFR Ceiling and Visibility Minima Relief. The certificate holder may, at their discretion, apply § 135.609 HTAWS or NVIS Class G VFR ceiling and visibility minima when either the helicopter is properly certificated for HTAWS or the helicopter is properly certificated for NVIS and the flightcrew is compliant in all respects with A050.

Select the fourth radio button option when the certificate holder does not qualify by installed and certified equipment or flightcrew training to conduct night HAA operations to lower Class G VFR minimum ceiling and visibility.

i. Class G VFR Ceiling and Visibility Minima Relief. The certificate holder is not authorized to apply § 135.609 HTAWS/NVIS Class G VFR ceiling and visibility minima.

j. The certificate holder, if authorized to conduct helicopter air ambulance (HAA) operations under IFR, is authorized to conduct those operations under the provisions of § 135.611.

k. In compliance with Title 49 U.S.C. § 44731, Collection of Data on Helicopter Air Ambulance Operations, all part 135 certificate holders utilizing this operations specification shall, as mandated by congress, report the following flight operations data to the FAA in their **Helicopter Air Ambulance Mandatory Flight Information Report**:

- The number of helicopters that the certificate holder uses to provide helicopter air ambulance services and the base locations of the helicopters.
- The number of flights and hours flown, by registration number, during which helicopters operated by the certificate holder were providing helicopter air ambulance services.
- 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, inter-facility transport, organ transport, or ferry or repositioning flight).
- The number of accidents, if any, involving helicopters operated by the certificate holder while providing air ambulance services and a description of the accidents.
- The number of flights and hours flown under instrument flight rules by helicopters operated by the certificate holder while providing air ambulance services.
- The time of day of each flight flown by helicopters operated by the certificate holder while providing air ambulance services.
- 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.

Reports shall be compiled annually on a template provided by the FAA beginning with calendar year 2015. Reports shall be submitted not later than 30 days following the close of the calendar year.