FAA
Aviation Safety

Memorandum

Date:

To: Office of Airports, Airports Regional and Districts Offices, Washington DC

From: Mark Steinbicker, Manager, Flight Technologies and Procedures Division

Subject: Proposed Heliport Temporary Evaluations Method Resulting from COVID-19

Purpose:

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a temporary heliport evaluation method during the COVID-19 pandemic. The intent is to work with our partners in the Office of Airports, Airports Regional and District Offices, and the Flight Standards District Offices (FSDO).

A Flight Standards (FS) team of Subject Matter Experts (SME) proposes a 180-day alternative method to the FAA Order 7400.2M. In addition, the team proposes a 90-day get-well window once the FAA and local travel restrictions are lifted to restore compliance with on-site heliport inspections.

Summary and Background:

A team of Flight Standards Subject Matter Experts (SME) conducted an operational safety review of the proposed temporary heliport evaluation method.

COVID-19 presents unique challenges to accomplishing on-site heliport inspections. For example, Aviation Safety Inspectors often use commercial travel to site locations and evaluate helipads in a hospital environment. Several of the impacted Non-Rulemaking Airport (NRA) locations are vital to Helicopter Air Ambulance (HAA) and First Responders.

FAA Order 7400.2M requires all proposals for the establishment of heliports must be given an on-site operational evaluation by operations specialists or inspectors, preferably those who are qualified on helicopters. Proposed heliports to be located in congested areas, and/or on a rooftop, should be evaluated by helicopter-qualified operations inspectors.

Discussion:

During the course of deliberations, the team discussed potential hazards associated with an initial tabletop of NRA cases to be followed by an on-site evaluation prior to operational use. After deliberations, the team did not identify any major additional hazards.

FAA Order 7400.2M states the Flight Standards Division is responsible for reviewing proposals to determine the safety of aeronautical operations, and of persons and property on the ground. It also states the Flight Standards District Office (FSDO) is responsible for reviewing Part 157 proposals for seaplane bases and heliports.

Under the current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic, the team believes the spirit of the FAA Order 7400.2M can be accomplished with an initial tabletop evaluation. The tabletop evaluation will be followed by an on-site evaluation prior to operational usage once the travel restrictions are removed.

Although the team did not identify any major additional hazards associated with the initial tabletop evaluation, members of the team recommend communicating with the Office of Airports, Airports Regional and District Offices, and the Flight Standards District Offices regarding the impact of NRA case backlog without this temporary evaluation plan.

Flight Procedures and Airspace Group (FPAG) actions:
- Compiled a list of outstanding heliport cases and established priorities
- Established an initial evaluation method utilizing the documents from the NRA case, eLAP, risk assessment tool, Heliport Dimension Tool, and Google Earth
- FPAG will continue to provide the FSDOs with the NRA cases that require an on-site evaluation and information reference the tabletop evaluation
- Establish short-term fix (next 180 days)
- Establish long-term get well plan (90 days from the lifting of the travel restriction)

Proposed Airports actions:
- Continue to provide the Letter of Determination (LOD)
- Continue with the process to establish heliport ID and NOTAMs
- Establish a procedure to allow FS input upon completion of the on-site evaluation
- Provide a Final Determination (similar to feasibility studies) upon completion of the on-site evaluation

Proposed FSDO actions:
- Establish a plan to conduct on-site inspections on NRA cases sent by FPAG
- Coordinate with FPAG on any know limitations