

How offshore helicopter travel is regulated







Safety - the top priority

The helicopter is known as the workhorse of the UK offshore oil and gas industry because it is the primary means of transporting workers to and from installations.

Millions of flights have taken place since the 1960s. The safety record is good, but accidents and fatalities have occurred. There can never be room for complacency with offshore helicopter safety, particularly in the harsh environment in which helicopters operate. That is why the arrangements to ensure the safety of offshore helicopter operations are so important. This leaflet describes those arrangements, and how they are regulated.

Who is responsible for safety?

While the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) are responsible for regulating safety, the actual **achievement** of safety is the responsibility of all of those on whom the law places a duty, including:

- helicopter operators;
- flight crews;
- installation operators;
- offshore workforce.

Helicopter operators must satisfy CAA that they continue to meet the requirements for safe public transport passenger operations. They demonstrate this by holding an Air Operator's Certificate (AOC), which requires operators to publish detailed operational procedures in the company's Operations Manual. They are also responsible for the safety briefing of passengers and, in conjunction with offshore duty holders, for providing certain personal safety equipment aboard the aircraft.

Helicopter operators have a duty under the Air Navigation Order (ANO) to only permit flights to suitable landing areas. The Helideck Certification Agency (HCA) acts on behalf of the helicopter operators for inspection of all helidecks operating in the UKCS and, together with them, ensures the application of operational limitations and/or restrictions where appropriate.

Flight crews are regulated by CAA in various aspects including licensing, training and testing requirements, and flight and duty-time limitations.

Installation operators are responsible for the safety of the entire installation, including the helideck and helideck operations. They are required to ensure that the helideck operating environment is such that helicopter operators can discharge their duties.



Installation operators have control over the physical characteristics of the helideck, the levels and manning of the rescue and fire-fighting facilities and communications. They are required to ensure that competent personnel are assigned to all activities on the helideck during helicopter operations. They must also have a weather policy in place for passenger safety on the helideck and for passenger survival and rescue in the event of an incident occurring.

It is very important that individuals act in a responsible way and comply with requirements specified by helicopter operators and installation operators.

Who regulates the system?

CAA regulates aviation legislation. HSE regulates health and safety law. They work together, with industry and others, to make sure that provisions for safety are as compatible and complete as possible. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) exists between HSE and CAA to ensure they work together effectively.

CAA

CAA is a statutory corporation and consists of several groups. The Safety Regulation Group is responsible for regulating the airworthiness and operational safety of an aircraft, including its passengers.

Under the Civil Aviation Act 1982, CAA is responsible for the operation of the ANO. This governs the airworthiness of helicopters and the technical and operational requirements that must be met. It also lays down the requirements for the issue of an AOC that helicopter operators must hold if they are to transport members of the public.

CAA has no duty under the Air Navigation Order to license offshore helidecks. However, to assist helicopter operators and the HCA to discharge their duty under the ANO, CAA provides ‘good practice’ guidance (known as CAP 437). This includes criteria helidecks should meet and other information enabling operators to comply with their legal obligations. HSE accepts that conformance with CAP 437 demonstrates compliance with their applicable offshore regulations.



HSE

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 is the main legislation providing for the health and safety of workers offshore. It also brings into its scope earlier legislation developed by the Department of Energy with specific requirements relating to helidecks on offshore installations and helicopter operations.

The Offshore Installations (Safety Case) Regulations 1992, among other things, require installation operators to identify all hazards which could cause a major accident, including helicopter accidents, and to take measures to reduce the risks to as low as is reasonably practicable.

These Regulations are supported by the following goal-setting offshore legislation which includes requirements on the safety of helidecks and helideck operations:

- Offshore Installations (Prevention of Fire and Explosion, and Emergency Response) Regulations 1995;
- Offshore Installations and Pipeline Works (Management and Administration) Regulations 1995;
- Offshore Installations and Wells (Design and Construction, etc) Regulations 1996.

HSE inspectors visit offshore installations on a regular basis to inspect all aspects of health and safety, including helidecks and helideck operations. During these visits the inspectors discuss safety with appointed safety representatives and individuals who may wish to raise issues with them.

Other organisations

In the event of an incident involving a helicopter there may be additional agencies involved. Search and rescue facilities are mainly the responsibility of the Department for Transport and its executive agency the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA). HSE's publication *Dealing with offshore emergencies* (see *Further reading*) sets out the respective roles of the various government departments and agencies that may become involved.



Working together

In addition to co-operating with other government agencies with a role to play in offshore safety, CAA and HSE work together closely on offshore helicopter issues. These include:

- policy development;
- operational matters;
- research;
- development of guidance for industry;
- accident investigation (in conjunction with the Air Accidents Investigation Branch of the Department for Transport).

In addition to regular policy and operational contacts at various levels, HSE and CAA meet several times each year to discuss major offshore helicopter safety issues. The two organisations also come together in the twice-yearly meetings of the Offshore Industry Advisory Committee Helicopter Liaison Group (OIAC HLG). Industry employer organisations and trade unions are also members of this committee.

There are a number of examples of **practical co-operation** between HSE and CAA, and with industry bodies, including:

- the industry and trade unions are consulted on proposals for new regulations and guidance affecting offshore helicopter travel;
- numerous research projects have been carried out by HSE, CAA and industry, including, most recently, development and issue of the Helideck Design Guidelines, which were endorsed by OIAC HLG.

Further reading

HSE, supported by CAA, have commissioned a report on the safety record of UKCS helicopter operations compared to various other modes of transport. It can be found on the HSE website at:

www.hse.gov.uk/offshore

You can also contact:

Hazardous Installations Directorate
Offshore Division
Lord Cullen House
Fraser Place
Aberdeen AB25 3UB
Tel: 01224 252500

CAA Flight Operations Inspectorate
(Helicopters)
Safety Regulation Group
Floor 1W, Aviation House
Gatwick Airport South
West Sussex RH6 0YR
Tel: 01293 573696
CAA website (for publications):
www.caa.co.uk

Publications

Dealing with offshore emergencies: A guide to the roles and responsibilities of the Government departments and agencies that may become involved in emergencies in the offshore oil and gas industry HSG142
(Second edition) HSE Books 2003
ISBN 0 7176 2684 9

Further information

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit www.hse.gov.uk/. You can view HSE guidance online and order priced publications from the website. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

A web version can be found at:
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg219.pdf.

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