



## **Recommended Practices for Charter Operations**

### **Introduction**

The BHA is a non-profit making organisation, whose main objective is to promote the use of helicopters throughout the country and to bring to the attention of potential users the advantages of chartering or owning a helicopter. It is also concerned that helicopter operations are conducted safely and responsibly and that proper attention is paid to environmental issues. These objectives are pursued by liaison with government departments, local authorities, the Civil Aviation Authority, public services, private industry and exchange of information with other helicopter organisations outside the UK.

This Code of Practice has been written to inform potential clients of some important basic facts concerning the commercial operation of helicopters. The aim is to ensure that high standards of safety and professional competence are maintained throughout the industry.

The Code of Practice has been endorsed by the BHA's Council of Management, following consultation with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

### **Aviation Law**

The conduct of civil aviation in the United Kingdom is set out in the Civil Aviation Act 1982. The enabling document under which powers are delegated to the CAA is the Air Navigation Order 2000 (ANO). The latter contains the precise detail of how flights are to be conducted by all types of aircraft, including helicopters, in the United Kingdom.

The prime purpose of the ANO is safety and UK standards are regarded as some of the highest in the world. Three basic safety principles are:

- No aircraft may be operated in such a way that, even if an engine fails, third parties on the ground are put at risk.
- If there are fare paying passengers on board an aircraft, the operator is required to ensure that certain mandatory safety standards are met to ensure that risk of injury to passengers is minimised.
- In the case of private flights, the CAA ensures that minimum standards in respect of pilot training and licensing, helicopter construction and maintenance are met.

Article 6 of the ANO requires public transport flights to be conducted under and in accordance with an Air Operators' Certificate (AOC). The standards which an operator must meet to be granted and maintain an AOC have recently been published in (European) Joint Aviation Requirements - Operations 3 - Commercial Air Transportation (Helicopters). These requirements are based on, and are similar in most respects to, UK provisions which may be found in CAA Publication 360.

### **Requirements of an AOC**

Most companies in the UK which hold an AOC belong to the BHA. Anyone contemplating chartering or paying for a journey in a helicopter is advised to contact the BHA for a list of member companies.



The operating and maintenance standards of each AOC Holder are monitored regularly by Flight Operations Inspectors and Surveyors assigned by the Safety Regulation Group of the CAA. Stringent standards must be adhered to and comprehensive records kept on a wide range of requirements including: operational procedures, weather minima, fuel policy, flight preparation and passenger briefing, selection of landing sites, communications and emergency equipment, maintenance system, technical records, flight crew qualifications and training and flight time limitations. Consequently a flight in a helicopter operated by an AOC Holder is safe and well-regulated.

Strict rules govern the minimum qualifications and standards of training for pilots employed by AOC Holders. He/she must be in possession of a current Airline Transport Pilot's License (Helicopter) to be the commander of a helicopter with more than nine seats or, as a minimum, a Commercial Pilot's License (Helicopter) for smaller helicopters. Frequent checks are carried out by the CAA. The holder of a private pilot's license is not legally permitted to receive any remuneration for carrying either passengers or freight.

Despite the understandable interest created by helicopter accidents, there is no justification for singling out the helicopter as being any more dangerous than any other form of transport. The correct view, supported by evidence, is that in recent years very few accidents have been caused by mechanical failure. Helicopters have become increasingly reliable and safe. Many accidents have been attributed to inexperience or unfamiliarity with the conditions encountered. No member of the public on the ground in this country has ever been hurt as a result of a mishap to a civil helicopter in flight.

### **Safety Record**

The majority of helicopter passenger movements in the United Kingdom, some 250,000 flights each year, occur in the off-shore energy support sector and the safety record is commendable, particularly in view of the weather conditions experienced throughout the year. The only scheduled passenger service, from Penzance to the Scilly Isles, commenced in 1964. Extremely high safety standards can be expected by those who charter or travel in a helicopter from a company which holds an AOC and is an operating member of the BHA.

### **Why travel by helicopter?**

Many people involved in aviation have never considered chartering a helicopter. Some of those with no experience of the helicopter's uniquely versatile characteristics dismiss them out-of-hand or believe they are of use only by military, police, air ambulance or search and rescue services.

A helicopter, in comparison with a conventional fixed wing aeroplane of similar seating capacity, is likely to be slower and more expensive in terms of both capital and operating costs. However, one of the disadvantages of a fixed wing aeroplane is that it is restricted to using prepared airfields which by their very nature require considerable amounts of expensive land. Furthermore, airfields are not always sited at locations where the air traveller wishes to go and their limited number can also cause congestion resulting in delays at major centres.

In contrast, the helicopter does not require an expensive infra-structure and what it may lose by way of speed and cost it makes up in flexibility by providing door to door service for its



users without having to depend on conventional airfields. The compactness of the United Kingdom with its main cities, manufacturing and financial centres all relatively close together, plus a radial surface transportation system of motorways and railways emanating from London, makes the helicopter an ideal business tool.

For corporate use where, for example, a company might require a party of five or six executives to attend site meetings or conferences in three or four locations around the country in one day, chartering a helicopter can make very sound business sense. Add the fact that those travelling by helicopter will avoid the frustrations of normal scheduled airline, rail or road travel and probably save one or more night's hotel bills, the helicopter is a most attractive option.

### **Public acceptance and environmental impact**

Whereas the general public has developed a high degree of acceptance of fixed wing aircraft, appreciation of helicopters tends to be more limited and less sympathetic. This is reflected in press and political comment, thereby reinforcing the adverse public perception of the helicopter.

However adverse comment does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the public at large. Although some people dislike and distrust helicopters, a far larger number, of all ages and backgrounds, are keen to experience a helicopter flight themselves, as is evident from the number of people who pay for a short pleasure or sightseeing flight when the opportunity arises. Many leading politicians find it essential to travel by helicopter to maintain their schedules and many sections of the media make extensive use of the helicopter industry.

One reason for an ambivalent attitude to helicopters is their perceived noise and intrusiveness. It is therefore incumbent on operators and users of all types of helicopter to ensure that they cause the minimum of environmental impact. This can be achieved by:

- Careful selection of the location of helicopter landing sites
- Sensible flight planning, to include environmental impact as a factor, together with the meteorological forecast and air traffic requirements
- Pilots flying in accordance with the BHA's 'Pilots' Code of Conduct'.

Helicopters can land at almost all established airports and other airfields, subject to observance of local air traffic and ground handling procedures. They can also be landed at any site at which it is safe to do so, provided the owner has given permission. CAA requirements for landing sites in congested and urban areas are much more stringent than for greenfield sites. However, in all cases helicopter operators are advised to ensure that local interests are consulted and, where possible, accommodated.

### **Flight planning**

Before a helicopter pilot takes off he/she will make thorough preparations for the flight. Factors to be considered include:

- The client's requirements in terms of passengers, baggage, destination(s), arrival times



- Weather, both en-route and at destination(s)
- Air traffic control, restricted areas and other aerial activity
- Fuel requirements, including contingency for diversions
- Topography
- Communications
- Requirement for special permissions from the CAA, eg, to land at a congested area
- Knowledge of layout of destination helipad(s)
- Time of sunset; additional requirements apply for flights at night
- Pilot's flight and duty time limits, in accordance with the ANO
- Aircraft equipment serviceability.

Prospective passengers are asked to provide timely and accurate information to the helicopter operator/pilot to aid the flight planning process.

### **Insurance**

In addition to complying with the conditions of an AOC a helicopter operating company must be in possession of an Operating Licence issued by the Consumer Protection Group of the CAA. To obtain and maintain this licence the operator must, among other things, meet the requirements of the EC Regulation on air carrier liability in the event of accidents, as incorporated into UK Law by the Air Carrier Liability Order 1998. This regulation determines the extent of an air carrier's liabilities and prescribes specific requirements for the provision of information to passengers. Details are set out in the operators' conditions of carriage.

Prospective passengers are advised to be aware of these conditions, which are similar to those followed by scheduled commercial airlines, so that they may take out additional insurance if required. It should also be noted that there is no legal obligation for a helicopter flying privately to carry any third party or insurance at all.

### **Conduct of the Flight**

The pilot or another member of the operator's staff will brief passengers before boarding the helicopter. The extent of this briefing will depend on the passengers' previous experience of helicopter travel and the nature of the flight. Particular attention should be paid to this briefing if passengers are to board with rotors turning.

Baggage, equipment and loose clothing must be held safely and securely whilst embarking/disembarking and in the helicopter. Safety instructions, normally available on a laminated card, must be followed, as must all instructions from the pilot.

### **DO'S AND DONT'S**

Do:

- Make sure the operating company holds an Air Operators' Certificate. This should be in the name of the company to which payment is made unless you are dealing directly with a known agent.



- Contact the BHA for an Information Handbook which lists operating companies, fleet size and locations. The BHA is an independent body acting for the civil helicopter industry in the United Kingdom.
- Ask if the quotation is all inclusive, i.e., landing fees, parking fees. If you are late, extension fees might be chargeable at your destination heliport.
- Inform the operator/agent if your passengers are carrying bulky/heavy luggage or equipment, i.e., golf bags, or have any special handling needs.
- Enquire if your pilot holds a valid Air Transport or Commercial Pilot's Licence and that the type of aircraft in which you are flying is listed on this licence.
- Make allowance in your schedule for the possibility of inclement weather.
- Give the operator or pilot as much information as possible of any change to your planned schedule, particularly if you might be delayed. This could affect the pilot's statutory flight duty time limitations.

**There is only one, very important Don't:**

- Question your pilot's decisions. He is responsible for your safety.