



February 2014



Our priority as the Helicopter Safety Steering Group has always been, and will continue to be, the safety of offshore workers in the UKCS. Our main focus is on helicopter accident prevention, and the CAA review contains extensive recommendations aimed at accident prevention. However we understand the importance of also mitigating any safety issues arising should a helicopter have to land on water and have prepared answers to the main questions you may have resulting from the review and the potential impacts on offshore travel in the coming months.

The review contains 32 actions which the CAA intend to take and a further 29 recommendations to other bodies such as EASA, and the wider industry. Of these, six actions will be mandated by the CAA via operational safety directives to the helicopter companies and the helicopter companies will be required to comply with them. The CAA envisages that the remaining actions and recommendations will be taken forward by the Operational Safety Committee described in the review, working in collaboration with the oil and gas industry, Step Change and the HSSG.

What will happen to the seating distribution on helicopters?

The report contains an action requiring every passenger on a helicopter to sit by an emergency exit with effect from 1st June 2014 unless they have a 'Category A' breathing system or the helicopter is fitted with a side-floating device. It will be many months or even years before Side floating devices for helicopters are available so the industry will be working to introduce Category A emergency breathing systems as a high priority. After 1st June 2014 any seats that are not next to an emergency exit - one of the doors or windows - will not be used until Category A breathing systems are available. We don't yet know if category A devices will be ready but if they aren't, the seating capacity of the entire fleet of all helicopter types will be reduced by about 40% of the maximum seating capacity. This might mean that there will need to be more flights offshore to accommodate the reduced seat usage.

What are 'Category A' breathing systems?

At the moment there are only draft definitions for Category A and Category B breathing systems. The LAP jacket re-breather system which is currently used is likely to be classified as category B. Work is being progressed to secure category A emergency breathing systems as a matter of high priority. One type of category A device is in commercial offshore use in Canada and other types of device are in use in military and search and rescue service. A detailed specification for the category A device needs to be developed and a suitable device for commercial North Sea service selected. HSSG will be closely involved and monitoring progress to ensure that fit for purpose devices are procured.

Will we have to be re-trained to use the new breathing systems?

By introducing a new breathing system, there will of course be implications on training people to use them. At the moment, we do not know what these training implications are and whether it would be physical training or if they could be included in the safety briefing pre-flight. We work together with the manufacturers to understand what the training implications will be.

Is the current BOSIET and FOET course going to remain valid if the standards are changed?

A review of BOSIET and FOET standards is planned to take place this year, and the recommendations in the CAA report will be considered by OPITO and industry as part of that review. As with all previous reviews of training standards, if changes are made to the standard, including reducing periodicity of refresher training if agreed, training conducted to the previous standard will remain valid until certificate expiry or otherwise as communicated by industry.

Are all windows on a helicopter classified as escape exits?

Basically, yes. All windows and doors in a helicopter can and should be used as an escape in the event of an uncontrolled ditching. However in controlled circumstances the primary means of escape is always going to be the main emergency exits.

What will the restriction be on size and shape of the workforce?

There will be some restrictions on size of the offshore workforce in the not too distant future – at the moment we don't know what that will be. The CAA review has set a deadline of the 1st April 2015 for all offshore workers to be able to fit out of push-out window emergency exits, so if there is a size restriction those affected will have time to address it. The size of a passenger on a helicopter in their survival suit should not exceed the smallest window on a helicopter to ensure a good prospect of survivability.

What is the new sea-state limit for helicopters to fly?

The CAA review states that from June 1st 2014 there should be no flights offshore if the sea exceeds sea state 6. Sea State 6 is defined as the range of sea states between 4 metres and 6 metres significant wave height. All of the helicopter operators already work to the limit of Sea State 6.

From 1st September 2014, CAA is proposing a more restrictive standard, related to the certified ditching performance of the helicopter concerned. CAA is also looking for changes in the way this is measured and demonstrated, which makes it difficult to predict what the impact on flight availability will be. There could be a significant reduction in the availability of flights during winter months, the extent of which is yet to be determined.

We are committed to keeping everyone updated as we continue to develop our understanding of the CAA actions and recommendations.

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