



Interagency Aviation Accident Prevention Bulletin



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Subject: “Doors off” Helicopter Operations

Area of Concern: Flight Safety

Distribution: All Aviation Operations.

Discussion: Two recent events highlighted the risks associated with conducting flight operations in a helicopter with the doors off (removed). While there are certain missions that may require the doors to be removed [e.g., Aerial Capture Eradication and Tagging of Animals (ACETA), Aerial Ignition, and Single-skid Toe-in and hover Exit/entry Procedures (STEP)], other missions such as passenger/crew transport, generally do not. In one of the events, an item in the back seat dislodged from the interior of the helicopter and struck the tail rotor, causing damage that rendered it inoperable during flight. The pilot was able to successfully execute an emergency autorotation and land the aircraft without any additional damage or injuries. In the other event, a seat back cushion from the back seat became loose and was discovered hanging out of the helicopter when the pilot landed to pick up DOI employees. Fortunately, no damage or injury resulted from the event. Both events involved passenger/crew transport missions.



Before flying in a helicopter with the doors removed, answer the following questions. These questions should also be a part of the project aviation safety plan (PASP) or Mission Aviation Safety Plans (MASP)

1. Is it necessary for the doors to be removed?
2. Have you carefully evaluated the risk/benefit of flying your mission with the doors removed?
3. How can these risks be mitigated?
4. Are supplemental personal restraints installed for use?
5. Has each individual ensured that equipment in pockets is secured and free of loose objects?
6. Is the cabin of the aircraft free of debris and is all loose equipment sufficiently secured?
7. Are there policies & contract language regarding flying with the doors removed?
8. Are there other issues (passenger apprehension, fear, or panic) that need to be taken into consideration?

REMEMBER: [14 CFR 91.7](#) states that “the pilot in command of a civil aircraft is responsible for determining whether that aircraft is in condition for safe flight.” A thorough preflight inspection and final walk-around are key to fulfilling this responsibility. Postflight inspection can also help to identify issues prior to the next flight.

Doors off operations can add significant risk to a mission by increasing the opportunity for objects to depart the cabin area during flight. These objects can strike the main rotor or tail rotor resulting in a loss of control and ultimately, a fatal accident.

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