

President's Message

A Growing Tide of Operators are Providing IFR Training – to their VFR Helicopter Pilots

For years, the conventional wisdom in the helicopter industry has been NOT to provide IFR training to VFR helicopter pilots – “Because they should be avoiding IMC at all costs – particularly when they are low-and-slow. A little IFR knowledge may lead them to believe that they can proceed in IMC, when in fact their chances of landing successfully are very slim”. There is clearly some truth to the conventional wisdom...however, a growing number of operators are challenging this paradigm by providing their pilots with hood-time in the aircraft and scenario-based simulator training under deteriorating weather conditions.

The rationale for this seems to be based on the follow reasoning:

1. Pilots and operators should establish a “hard” minimum go-no-go speed, at which they will be expected to land and wait for the weather to lift – wherever they are;
2. Under controlled circumstances, pilots should experience the hazards of low-visibility operations (obstacles, the loss of visual reference, and learn to appreciate the instability of the helicopter at low airspeeds under IMC or near-IMC circumstances);
3. In training, pilots should experience real-life scenarios that simulate helicopter operations – including customer-pressure, changing and unpredictable weather, and aircraft unserviceabilities;
4. The IFR training that helicopter pilots receive may help them maintain control during temporary losses of visual reference – in smoke over a lake or in foggy circumstances at low altitude, for example when the horizon may be obscured – until they can recover and land, visually.

The growing consensus in the helicopter industry seems to be that a little knowledge – is not necessarily a dangerous thing...