



KEN ARMSTRONG

# Best Practices, Best Idea

*Be Part of the Solution*

**F**or years my condemnation of Transport Canada's senior leaders for their ineffective helicopter safety program has proven clairvoyant. Accident rates are abysmally high! Now, some helicopter folks are doing something that I believe will shrink the industry's ugly statistics.

Canada's forestry aviation managers and the Helicopter Association of Canada (HAC), after much consulting, have put a brilliant plan into action whereby novice and experienced helicopter crews now have broad spectrum guidelines that provide standards and training guidance. These prepare aviators for the gruelling challenges associated with the wide-ranging tasks related to fire suppression. The buzzword for this enlightening activity is "best practices." This specific program will allow relatively low time pilots to fly on forestry missions without needing to obtain 1,000–1,500 hours of flight experience. Co-operation is necessary in that an operator must train these low time aircrews in the specific flying, administrative and personal skills to safely accomplish forestry's goals. Nothing is free. Companies are going to have to invest in more ground school and additional flight training to get their pilots up to speed to qualify them for these best practices. After training, the operator then essentially certifies its personnel as qualified. What happens if forestry determines a pilot can't cut the mustard after the training and certification? Forestry personnel observe they will tend to provide easier tasks initially to low time certified pilots and as they prove themselves, more challenging tasks will be assigned. Of course, aircrew members who do not meet the grade will

not adopt these training/recurrency activities. The term and concept of "bottom feeders" was often repeated and consensus was that their "fishy" operations would be caught in the net of customer dissatisfaction and they would be left in the field to rot and become fertilizer. OK, I'll admit that I may have cast too far with that metaphor....

A few company representatives complained about the cost of additional training and paperwork; however, they really need to consider the costs of an accident! These include the loss of the deductible during a claim, loss of flying revenue, loss of trained crew and potentially a lost liability case when the court finds you negligent for not embracing best practices. When one tallies the losses and additional expenses related to a helicopter accident, additional training costs are a bargain – essentially a form of self-insurance. Moreover, an operator bears the responsibility of providing the best safety culture he can provide for crews and clients. Quite frankly, if you don't wholly support this logic and level of safety, no one really wants you in this industry.

While discussing HAC's contributions it should be noted the sub-committees have created other guideline documents that are available as downloads to everyone on HAC's website [www.h-a-c.ca/](http://www.h-a-c.ca/). These include: Class "D" External Loads, Heli Skiing and Belly Hook Switch Position (HAC Recommended practice). This organization has evolved very strongly since your scribe stood up in Las Vegas years ago at the HAI convention and passionately proposed Canada needed its own organization largely to overcome the destructive tariff wars between companies.

OK, this hasn't happened yet, but sometime in the future one hopes the rate cutting will abate so increased monies for crews, operators and maintenance will also benefit safety margins.

Other available downloads worthy of reading include the Industry Self-Management Feasibility Study as well as an excellent XLS program to analyze costs for setting tariffs

and a sample contract that can be used between an operator and client. These tools/guidelines can save a great deal of effort and money.

So, if you are not a member of the Helicopter Association of Canada, you might want to consider the question, "If you aren't part of the solution, maybe you are part of the problem?" It's lovely to have something to laud....

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**“When one tallies the losses...related to a helicopter accident, additional training costs are a bargain.”**

initially undergo discussions with senior firefighters to meet acceptable levels. If pilots are unable to achieve the standards, they will be asked to leave. If a company continues to provide sub standard aircrew they will find themselves sitting on the sidelines. So, in the end run, the onus is on the operator to ensure its staff are able to meet the best practices. This is the ideal motivation and is destined to achieve higher safety standards.

We need to create this caring safety culture to protect our employees and customers. Increasing your staff's knowledge and skills are prime methods for achieving this objective. Attendees at HAC's Best Practices presentation asked what would happen to operators who do