

## **Pilot Qualifications Working Group**

### **Pilot Competencies for Helicopter Wildfire Operations – Best Practices Training and Evaluation**

In the second quarter of 2007, a concern was brought forth at the Air Taxi Committee meeting during the HAC Annual Convention to further define Pilot Competencies for Helicopter Wildfire Operations. This same movement was then tabled on April 7, 2008 in Calgary at the annual Air Taxi Committee meeting where a sub committee of the HAC Air Taxi Committee was formed as a working group to focus on this movement.

The initial intention of the Pilot Qualifications Working Group was to more specifically identify the competencies of the pilots engaged in Wildfire Operations and address the HAC Operator member's concern that the minimum fixed hours currently required by Customers is an imprecise measure of a pilot's ability, further making it difficult to introduce competent pilots into the Customer's Wildfire Operations.

Wildfire Operations are a unique high-pressure environment with constantly changing operating conditions. This Working Group identified the areas with the greatest exposure and risk where a higher level of pilot competency is desirable; then developed eight Pilot Competencies for Helicopter Wildfire Operations required to operate within these circumstances. Developing specific pilot skills and providing in-depth training in those skill sets used during Wildfire Operations are designed to increase pilots, Operators and Customers knowledge, safety and an improved alternative to a minimum fixed hourly requirement alone.

The eight Pilot Competencies for Helicopter Wildfire Operations – Best Practices Training and Evaluation skill sets are as follows:

1. General Wildfire Operations Knowledge
2. Mountain Flying
3. External Load – Short Line (horizontal reference), Long Line (vertical reference), Precision Load Placement, Water Bucketing / Tanking
4. Class D External Loads
5. Aerial Ignition Device (AID) and Drip Torching
6. Hover Exit
7. Confined Area Operations
8. Low Visibility Flight

Nearly two years after the formation of the Pilot Qualifications Working Group, the HAC Board of Directors approved the first of many HAC Committee Best Practice documents:

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The Pilot Competencies for Helicopter Wildfire Operations document is a HAC/CIFFC (Canadian Inter-Agency Forest Fire Centre) document, which is publicly available as Pilot Competencies for Helicopter Wildfire Operations – Best Practices Training and Evaluation. This document has been created with the intention that it will be embraced by HAC member operators, customers and associate government agencies; in particular those that support fire suppression activities - Therefore ultimately increasing safety in Wildfire Operations.

The ***Pilot Competencies for Helicopter Wildfire Operations – Best Practices Training and Evaluation*** document is available for viewing on the HAC website in the "Guidelines and Best Practices" section ([http://www.h-a-c.ca/PQWG-Pilot\\_Compentencies\\_for\\_Helicopter\\_Wildfire\\_Operations.pdf](http://www.h-a-c.ca/PQWG-Pilot_Compentencies_for_Helicopter_Wildfire_Operations.pdf)) ; as well as on the HAC Committees Site. The General Knowledge modules are available for viewing online at: [http://www.cifff.ca/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=114&Itemid=259](http://www.cifff.ca/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=114&Itemid=259), this page is also linked with a button directly from Webair.

Canadian helicopter operators will use the document to ensure their pilots meet the competency expectations of the Customers. Operators involved in Wildfire Operations will realize little change to their current training programs; although what they will experience is a streamlined reporting process available to all forestry agencies across Canada in a unified format. Skills that a pilot has received training and experience in and has demonstrated a satisfactory level of competence in will be indicated in the pilot information section of the Webair Canada program. This information will be secure, accessible only to the pilots, employer and to forest agencies.

Each of the Forest Agencies will select their specific compilation of the eight skills that apply to their Wildfire Operations environment, and it is at the discretion of the Customers to choose those particular skill sets the Wildfire Operations of their jurisdiction requires. The Western forest agencies (MB, NWT, YK, SK, AB, BC) have all confirmed that they will be using the Pilot Competencies for Helicopter Wildfire Operations – Best Practices Training and Evaluation requirements for 2011. Because the Northern and Western agencies will certainly be utilizing the competencies for the 2011 fire season, the Helicopter Association of Canada will be holding an information session for all helicopter operators at the 2011 HAC convention in Vancouver (date and time to be announced).

