

Follow-up Action on Occurrence Report

INCIDENT INVOLVING AEROSPATIALE SA365N, G-PDGN, KYLE OF LOCHALSH ON 21 JANUARY 2002
(HELICOPTER GLANCED OFF WATER WHEN CONDENSATION OBSCURED WINDSCREEN)

CAA FACTOR NUMBER : F29/2003
FACTOR PUBLICATION DATE : 10 September 2003
OPERATOR : PDG Helicopters
CAA OCCURRENCE NUMBER : 2002/00277
AAIB REPORT : Bulletin 8/2003

SYNOPSIS

(From AAIB Report)

The flight was planned to depart at 0815 hrs from a heliport located at Kyle of Lochalsh, operating under Visual Flight Rules (VFR). The weather conditions were assessed by the commander before departure as surface wind easterly at 10 kt, cloud base above 600 feet, visibility 5 km with heavy rain. The local time of sunrise was at 0834 hrs. The route was to the north and, because of low cloud over the land, it was planned to cross over the Skye Bridge and to continue over water along the Inner Sound towards the destination on Rona Island, a distance of about 20 nm. The flight was part of a regular contract to take personnel to various locations in the area; thus both the commander and the passengers frequently flew on the route.

The passengers walked out to the helicopter at about 0815 hrs. It was raining hard and consequently their clothing was wet by the time they boarded. The commander and one of the passengers were wearing survival suits, the remainder of the passengers were dressed in normal clothing. When boarding was complete the commander started the engines, keeping his door open in an attempt to prevent an accumulation of condensation. After engine start he selected the demist system on and closed the door.

The helicopter took off at 0820 hrs towards the south and, after it had departed, the lights at the heliport were turned off. After takeoff the commander carried out a turn to the right and climbed to 300 feet amsl, heading towards the Skye Bridge. Finding that the weather conditions and continuing accumulation of condensation on the windscreen were such that he could not continue the planned flight under Visual Flight Rules, he decided to return to the departure point. He informed the passengers of his intention and believed that he may also have radioed to the base at this time. He commenced a turn to the right and carried out the landing checks, but he had difficulty in locating the landing site. The condensation on the inside of the windshield was restricting his forward visibility. He was able to see the lights on the shore and to identify the locality of the heliport but could not see precisely where it was. He opened his side window to help improve the visibility and attempted to clear the forward windscreen using a towel. He did this by leaving the collective pitch control lever unguarded for a time, moving his left hand to the cyclic and using his right hand to wipe the screen. Looking again out of the side window he suddenly saw the sea surface some 10 feet below and, with both hands now back on the controls, initiated a full power climb. He was however unable to arrest the descent in time to prevent the helicopter from momentarily contacting the water.

The impact was described as a thud or jolt by those in the cabin. The helicopter lifted off again into a climb. When level at about 100 feet the commander radioed the base, the lights were switched on for him and he located the

heliport. He flew to the landing area, where the ground crew visually inspected the undercarriage before he carried out a normal landing.

FOLLOW UP ACTION

The two Safety Recommendations, made by the AAIB following their investigation, are reproduced below, together with the CAA's responses.

Recommendation 2003-09

It is recommended that the Civil Aviation Authority review the terms of the Air Operator's Certificates issued to those helicopter operators whose operations take place over water where the water temperature may be less than +10°C. A special requirement for the wearing of survival suits by both crew and passengers where the likely rescue time exceeds the estimated survival time should be considered. Particular attention should be paid to those flights where personnel are carried on a regular basis as a part of their work, with a view to standardising requirements whatever the nature of the industry.

CAA Response

The CAA accepts this Recommendation.

The CAA has reviewed the terms of the Air Operators Certificate's issued to those helicopter operators whose operations take place over water where the water temperature may be less than +10°C and has considered a special requirement for the wearing of survival suits by both crew and passengers where the likely rescue time exceeds the estimated survival time.

Passengers onboard helicopters operated in support of oil/gas exploitation are required to wear survival suits by JAR-OPS 3. In the case of overwater operations conducted by single engine helicopters in accordance with either a Permission under Article 36(5)(b) of the Air Navigation Order (in the case of an ANO AOC holder) or the coastal corridor concept contained in JAR-OPS 3.240 (by a JAR Ops AOC holder), both crew and passengers are already required to wear survival suits if the water is below +10°C (ANO) or if the likely rescue time exceeds the estimated survival time (JAR-OPS). In these instances the significant common factor is that an exposure to a ditching exists in the event of an engine failure occurring during the offshore take-off and landing phase of flight for the offshore oil/gas exploitation twin helicopters or during prolonged overwater flight for the single engine helicopters.

To require the provision of survival suits for all overwater passenger flights in the circumstances recommended in the report is considered impractical and not justified for 'normal' overwater transit flights by multi-engine helicopters. It is accepted however that operators may, for specific contracts or tasks, have a duty of care to look closely at introducing enhancements to basic legislative requirements and consider whether the provision of additional equipment and/or training, would be appropriate. A FODCOM will be published by 31 October 2003 advising operators to consider the safety benefits of providing survival suits to passengers and crews when appropriate to the circumstances of the task.

CAA Status - Closed

Recommendation 2003-77

It is recommended that the Civil Aviation Authority require operators of flights for which there is an existing equipment requirement for a Radio Altimeter to be fitted, to have, in their operations manuals, a procedure for the setting of the height bug.

CAA Response

The CAA accepts this Recommendation.

The CAA will require operators of flights for which there is an existing equipment requirement for a Radio Altimeter to be fitted to have, in their operations manuals, a procedure for the setting of the height bug or equivalent decision height indicator.

A FODCOM will be published by 31 October 2003 informing operators of flights where there is a requirement for a Radio Altimeter of the need to review their Operations Manuals, amending them where necessary, to ensure that they contain a procedure for the setting of the height bug or equivalent decision height indicator.

CAA Status - Open