

Cockpit image recording on helicopters

Recent technology has produced small, lightweight data recording devices suitable for use in small helicopters that lack traditional flight data recorders. The most popular models of these devices have built-in video recorders that image the cockpit area.

IFALPA pilots have long supported the use of flight data recorders recognising the potential they hold for improving flight safety. Airline pilots even reluctantly accepted cockpit voice recorders after assurances by authorities that this sensitive safety information would be used only for aircraft accident and serious incident investigations.

Unfortunately, this commitment has not been kept and this sensitive information is being publicly disclosed and used for purposes other than what was intended.

While cockpit video recorders are focused on the instrument panel, identifiable images of flight crewmembers can be captured by these devices. Given that national authorities have been unable to secure voice recordings from misuse, and given the increased interest that video would present, cockpit video would clearly find a way into the public arena. Such a release would have a devastating effect both on safety and on the family members of those involved exposed to such video following a fatal accident.

Furthermore, images that permit the recognition of a crew member would violate the de-identification stipulation of a well structured FOQA program, potentially compromising data from that use.

The current examples of light data recorders capture many important parameters including position, altitude, airspeed, heading, aircraft attitude, acceleration and cockpit audio to name a few. Cockpit video of an instrument panel would not add sufficient data for accident analysis to offset the liabilities such a recording represents and is therefore strongly opposed by IFALPA.

IFALPA will continue its opposition to the installation and use of cockpit image recorders for commercial helicopter operations until it can be shown conclusively that no image of any crew member can or will be recorded by such devices and that any video or audio recordings can and will be fully protected from public disclosure.