Interagency Aviation
Safety Alert

No. IA 06-03 **July 28, 2006**

Subject: **Duties Requiring Additional Attention to Detail**

Area of Concern: **Aviation Operations**

Distribution: **All Fire and Aviation Personnel**

Discussion: A review of recently reported SAFECOMs indicates that a trend is becoming evident; pre-flight inspections are not being thoroughly completed, and checklists are not being utilized. This of course is not true in every case, but it is occurring with enough regularity that it warrants attention. Several of the following incidents could have been prevented with proper pre-flight inspections and by using checklists. Fatigue, complacency or a false sense of urgency to accomplish a mission can all be contributing factors in incomplete pre-flight inspections or failure to use a checklist.

A few recent incidents include: pilots taking off without checking fuel, starting helicopters with rotors tied down, loose fuel caps, unlatched windows, and doors not properly shut. Many of these incidents could have had severe consequences. The following excerpts are from a few of the SAFECOMS:

- During take off with a Bambi bucket on a 100' long line the left front door came open. The pilot lowered the helicopter to the ground and closed and locked the door. Continued the mission with no further incident.

- An airplane departed Billings with less than full fuel. The pilot did not visually verify a full fuel level, depended on fuel receipt, which was incorrect. Pilot noticed fuel deficiency 10 minutes into flight. Fuel load was sufficient for 2 hours of flight, but not sufficient for a 4.5 hour mission duration. Aircraft returned to airport immediately without incident.

- Aircraft starter was engaged with rotors tied down. The pilot was sitting in the pilot seat engrossed in programming a GPS for the mission, which took some time. The helo crew was enroute from another location. The pilot was alone. The manager got in the a/c and strapped in. The pilot failed to do a walk around prior to starting. The starter was engaged and both the pilot and the manager realized immediately that the rotor was still tied down. The start was aborted immediately and the rotor blade was untied. No limits were exceeded.

- Upon return from a short flight, the pilot found the fuel cap missing. There was no fuel loss during flight. The pilot contacted the FBO and Airport Manager and the fuel cap was found in the run up area.

- Tanker-XXX returned to base after dropping retardant on the fire. The pilot informed the tanker manager that the RH side window had inadvertently opened during flight due to being only partially latched and locked, resulting in the cracking of the upper portion of the plexiglas.

- Upon return from a fire, the pilot flared for landing. He looked at the landing gear lights and saw that the gear was not down. At about this same time, he heard a brief buzzing sound coming from outside of the airplane. He executed a go-around, re-entered the pattern and landed without further incident. On the go-around, all engine instrumentation appeared normal and engines were running smoothly. Inspection of the aircraft following shut-down revealed that both propellers had contacted the runway.

Recommendations:

- **SLOW DOWN, DO A COMPLETE PRE-FLIGHT and USE YOUR CHECKLIST, every flight, every time!**

- With flight activity increasing in all areas, be MORE vigilant while conducting pre-flight inspections and while using aircraft checklists.

- Work together to ensure a safe flight. Effective Crew Resource Management (CRM) includes a good pre-flight by the pilot and a look-around by all personnel involved in the mission.

- **SLOW DOWN, LOOK AROUND AND CROSS CHECK EACH OTHER.**

- Base Managers need to be vigilant in ensuring that flight crews are staying hydrated and must watch for signs of heat stress and fatigue. Flight crews need cool, comfortable rest areas and plenty of water. Below are a couple of links to heat stress and fatigue information. Please print these documents along with this safety alert.
  - **Heat Stress:** http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/fitness/heat_stress//hs_pg1.html
  - **Fatigue:** http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/h_s_rpts/spring_2002/signs.htm
  - **Fatigue:** http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/h_s_rpts/spring_2002/fatigue.htm

- Don't assume that the pilot or anyone else knows that an event has occurred. Events could include:

  • Using the incorrect fuel for a particular type of engine.
  • Damage to rotor blades.
  • Fuel spills.
  • Blade strikes.
  • Warning lights or caution lights.

- Last but not least. **IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING!**

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