

Profiling Risk in Part

The CAA has developed a second sector risk profile (SRP) to look at how risks can be reduced. This time it covers Part 135 operators – helicopters and small aeroplanes.

The Part 135 sector is a small but increasingly important part of New Zealand's growth both domestically and internationally. It is vital that we understand the risks to operators and customers. From 2006 to 2014, there have been 45 accidents involving operations under Part 135 of the rule.

Risk-based Regulation

The CAA aims to reduce the economic and social costs of aviation accidents, and uses a risk-based approach in regulating the aviation industry.

Following a tender process, in early 2015, the CAA commissioned Navigatus Consulting to conduct the Part 135 Sector Risk Profile.

An SRP is an effective tool that examines various underlying influences on safety within a sector to assess the risks, so that targeted and appropriate intervention can be applied.

Navigatus conducted research, surveying Part 135 participants (pilots and operators) and collating their feedback, interviewed CAA staff, and worked with the CAA to analyse operator and accident data.

From the collected information, Navigatus produced a report identifying and ranking the risks. This report is now available on the CAA web site, www.caa.govt.nz, "Safety Info – Safety Reports – Sector Risk Profiles".

The Part 135 Sector

Part 135 operators cover a vast range of activities including passenger transport, air ambulance, and search and rescue.

The sector is expected to expand, particularly helicopter operations, driven mainly by projected tourist numbers.

What Are The Risks?

The risks are grouped into five key themes:

- » training and pilot experience
- » organisational environment and culture

- » sector safety culture and collaboration
- » institutional clients and their role in safety leadership
- » the regulator and its practice.

Within the five themes, 17 risk areas are identified and assessed based on the immediacy and distance or directness of influence on pilot decision-making.

For example, the risks most directly impacting pilot decision-making in a flight and operational sense include:

Fatigue

Some pilots tolerate a mild to medium level of fatigue during peak season due to a perceived obligation (that may be self imposed) to 'get the job done', or the belief they can handle it.

Pressure to Fly in Challenging Conditions or Circumstances

While most operators are aware of the support they need to provide to pilots – especially newer pilots – and ensure there's



Part 135 Operations



no pressure to fly in challenging conditions, this isn't evident across all operators, especially during peak seasons.

Risks areas of direct impact but relevant more to the operator or organisation include:

'Just Culture'

We know that an honest, supportive culture is important for driving safety performance. This is where everyone can raise concerns and issues, and discuss and learn from operational experience and mistakes. However, developing and maintaining both a voicing and 'just culture' takes determination and leadership. These cultures aren't universal across the sector.

Other risk areas with a close impact on pilot decision-making but more relevant to operators and organisations include:

Pilot Experience Gap

There is a sector-wide experience gap between new and very experienced pilots. Some younger pilot in the fixed-wing sub-sector leave to pursue a career in larger aircraft operations,

while some in helicopter sub-sector leave to gain further experience overseas.

Audit Consistency and Focus

Some operators are looking for mutual benefits from their audit involvement with the CAA. Further work is planned to increase CAA auditor skills aimed at improving consistency and adding value.

How Will Risk be Reduced?

"Responsible operators will identify and manage their own risk," says Dominik Gibbs, CAA Regulatory Intelligence Analyst.

"The SRP enables them, and the CAA, to have a better understanding of the risks associated with their operations, meaning we can work together to set safety performance goals and reduce risk."

Now that the report has highlighted the risks faced by this sector, it is the responsibility of the participants and the CAA to work together on mitigating those risks.

"We want operators to use the report to develop actual tasks to address the risk areas. Systems will then need to be developed to track the work results, provide resources as required, and establish timeframes for completion of tasks. This is consistent with the implementation of Safety Management Systems," says Dominik.

"Obviously, all the risks can't be mitigated at once. Some areas will be more challenging than others.

"But even starting on the smaller 'quick wins', will start to reduce the risks."

SRP and Other Aviation Sectors

The previous SRP on the agricultural sector was well received and progress has been made, but work is continuing.

"This is about changing culture within the industry, so it's a long and ongoing process," says Dominik.

"However, we're now working more closely with the New Zealand Helicopter Association and the Agricultural Aviation Association. They're using our data in their regular safety bulletins which were started after the last profile was released."

The CAA is now looking at other sectors that will benefit from an SRP.

"We want to encourage a strong safety culture," says Dominik. "This SRP allows the industry and the CAA to understand the risks, and how they impact pilots, operators, and the sector.

"We look forward to working closely with Part 135 operators to reduce risk and make aviation even safer." ■