

Heli Passenger Seating – No More Fish Bins

Actually, your passengers *can't* sit on fish bins and backpacks in the rear of your helicopter. It's a breach of the rules.

After being alerted to the practice of helicopter passengers sitting on baggage and cargo, the CAA wants to make it clear this is a breach of rule 91.207.

"Anything other than a seat or 'berth' meeting the correct aviation standard is not permitted," says Grant Twaddle, CAA Team Leader of Flight Operations – Helicopter.

"Approved seats or berths have to provide the required performance, load weight, strength, material and workmanship, protection of the structure, and safety belt anchorage.

"It's obvious that a backpack or any other baggage or cargo would not meet those requirements."

The purpose of rule 91.207 is to ensure passengers' safety. To do that, a seat needs to be in a fixed position, and stable, especially important during takeoff and landing.

But passengers sitting on a backpack have to ground themselves and remain stationary, as best they can, by using their legs.

"Seats are also designed to give the occupant crash protection by absorbing

(or 'attenuating') some of the impact forces," says Grant.

"Sitting on a pack or other objects obviously does not give the occupant that protection."

Roger Shepherd, CAA's Investigating Officer ARCs, says he would not want to be an operator ending up in the Coroner's Court, "Trying to explain why they thought a fish bin full of blue cod would be a better seat than the one designed by McDonnell Douglas."

Pilots allowing passengers to sit on their backpacks are also non-compliant with rule 91.213.

Under this rule, a person operating an aircraft has to ensure, before takeoff or landing, that all passenger baggage is stowed in a baggage locker, or under a passenger seat, so that it cannot slide forward under crash impact, or hinder the evacuation of the aircraft in an emergency.

In addition, unsecured items in the cabin become missiles in an accident.

'Baggage' is defined in the Civil Aviation Rules as, "personal property of passengers or crew carried on an aircraft by agreement with the operator,

or personal property of passengers or crew that is intended by passengers or crew to be carried on an aircraft."

That makes a backpack 'baggage'.

"It's also obvious," says Grant, "that any other objects sometimes used for sitting on, such as fish bins, do not meet the standards required of a proper seat.

"There are plenty of cargo pods on the market that are approved via STCs and modifications. These are what should be used to carry luggage and other items.

"Paying helicopter passengers are entitled to maximum safety measures and the only method of achieving that, for this issue, is to have them sitting in seats of an acceptable standard, and restrained by a seat belt or harness.

"We want to give the helicopter sector a heads-up that we'll be taking a close interest in their expositions to ensure they reflect the wording and spirit of rules 91.207 and 91.213," says Grant. ■

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