



Memorandum

**U.S. Department of
Transportation**

Office of the Secretary
of Transportation
Office of Inspector General

Subject: **INFORMATION:** Audit Announcement –
Review of FAA Progress in Reducing Helicopter
Emergency Medical Services (HEMS) Accidents
Federal Aviation Administration
Project No. 14A3002A000

Date: November 14, 2013

From: Jeffrey B. Guzzetti
Assistant Inspector General
for Aviation Audits

Reply to
Attn. of: JA-10

To: Director, Audit and Evaluation

Helicopter Emergency Medical Services (HEMS) operators provide an important service to the public by transporting seriously ill patients or life-saving donor organs to emergency care facilities. The industry safely transports over 400,000 patients in the United States each year, frequently under challenging conditions including night flight, poor weather, low visibility, and flight into unfamiliar landing sites. Since the mid-1990s, the number of helicopters providing these services has grown nearly 300 percent and the HEMS accident rate has almost doubled over that time.

Following a series of 8 fatal HEMS accidents in 2008 involving 29 fatalities, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), and Congress recognized the need to enhance safety in the HEMS industry. NTSB issued more than 30 safety recommendations to both FAA and the industry as a result of the accidents. Since 2008, there have been an additional 39 deaths and 19 injuries resulting from HEMS.

FAA issued a notice of proposed rulemaking in 2009 to address these concerns; however, a final rule has yet to be issued. Consequently, the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012¹ required that FAA take specific actions to reduce the HEMS accident rate, including short-term safety initiatives to promote the use of advanced technology, such as night vision equipment.

¹ P.L. 112-95 (Section 306).

On April 12, 2013, the Ranking Member of the Aviation Subcommittee of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure requested that we review FAA's progress in improving HEMS safety. Accordingly, our audit objectives are to evaluate (1) FAA's progress in meeting requirements for HEMS operations cited in the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012, and (2) whether FAA has implemented other actions to reduce the HEMS accident rate.

Our audit will include visits to FAA Headquarters and selected FAA Flight Standards District Offices responsible for oversight of HEMS operators. We plan to begin the audit the week of November 18, 2013, and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at (202) 366-0500 or Tina Nysted, Program Director, at (404) 562-3770.

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cc: DOT Audit Liaison, M-1
FAA Audit Liaison, AAE-100