

The Blue Coral Copter Caper

Directions:

ASSIGNMENT: You have been hired by the company “Blue Coral Copters Inc” as a safety consultant. Read the company’s story and write a safety report for the owner based on the content. Assess the situation and provide proper analysis and recommendations, including key steps towards creating a proactive safety program to prevent future incidents, and some explanation of a safety management system. Remember, you are working for the company, so keep their costs in mind.

You must integrate SMS and safety management principles into the report. You may be creative, adding or discussing non-stated issues that you see as a potential problem. Limit your literary license to real life issues with solid and valid safety management solutions. You are not writing a complete safety program. Rather, you are to examine the obvious and perhaps any latent issues that may have cause and effect on safety and operations. Find those potential errors and problems! Thence, make realistic analysis and recommendations applying lessons from the course and research. You must have references at the end of the report. Avoid subjective, emotional statements. Explain why something must change and apply sound safety management knowledge to support that change. Again, integrate the lessons from the course and also incorporate some fundamentals of Safety Management Systems(SMS).

HOT TIP: You are not a safety inspector issuing tickets. You are a safety consultant hired by the company to help with safety AND profit. Avoid over-the-top recommendations that would bankrupt a tour company. Have fun, get creative but keep the safety analysis real. Think beyond FARs and consider the operation in the sense of employing an SMS approach to risk/hazard analysis and resolution.

GRADING: This project is worth 30% of the overall course grade. Grading is based on the depth and detail of the analysis, as well as organization, coherent writing style and the ability to identify safety issues and provide realistic, safety based solutions supported by references. Critical analysis is a cornerstone to a good grade. The idea of this project is to incorporate what you learned in the course and apply that knowledge in the report.

FORMAT: The course safety report must demonstrate college level writing. It shall conform to APA standards and style. In addition, the following elements shall be part of the report:

- Report written in the third (3rd) person
- Title page
- Abstract
- Proper references
- Times New Roman, with 12-point font size
- Double Spaced
- 1-inch report margins

Rerer to the APA website <http://www.apastyle.org/manual/index.aspx> for further information.

Papers lacking the above elements will suffer major point reductions regardless of the safety content within the report. Length should come to 12-15 pages plus title, summary, abstract and reference pages. Remember, length does not ensure quality!

RESOURCES: In addition to reading the text and course material, you are encouraged to use various other resources, as well as reviewing any notes posted in the "Blue Coral Copter Report Center" discussion board. Also, your instructor may provide access to other resources and will assist you with questions.

DISCLAIMER: Real Island helicopter tour operations are professional and comply with all FAA standards. This story is for educational purposes only, and all events and persons herein are fictitious.

A LONG TIME AGO, BEFORE THERE WAS SMS

There was Blue Coral Copters!

...A New High in Island Sight Seeing"

By Rick Lawin

THE COMPANY: "Blue Coral Copters" operates sightseeing helicopters at Poolawhooie Beach Airport, on the big island of Hawaii. The company operates 10, single turbine engine, 5 place (4 passengers plus pilot) AS-350 helicopters. This style of helicopter is reliable and well suited for tour operations. Single pilot /single engine turbine helicopters are the normal aircraft of choice in the charter/tour business. This operation is conducted under Visual Flight Rules (no instrument flying) and with one pilot, standard in the tour industry.

There are 10 full time pilots. 5 part-time pilots, 5 office staff and Nick Doobie, the owner-pilot and operations manager fill out the ranks. Maintenance is contracted out to "Copter Doctors Inc", a certified repair station, located next door.

THE HISTORY: "Blue Coral Copters" was founded by Nick Doobie, a former champion big wave surfer who made millions selling 'Doobie Big Wave' surf boards and a related clothing line.

After achieving financial success on the ocean waves, Nick hit the airwaves. Nick learned how to fly helicopters, principally to make surfing movies and market his surfboard and clothing empire.

Nick Doobie is a laid back guy and close friends with a couple other guys in the helicopter industry. One is a helicopter mechanic, Dave Zanno who now operates "Copter Doctors" a helicopter repair service. Nick and his guys love Hawaii. They are well-liked by the locals. They are wealthy, unpretentious and love fun and adventure.

THE STORY: With his name and local connections, Nick's business expanded rapidly. "Blue Coral Copters" has a reputation for offering wonderful vacation packages and is highly profitable for Nick. They operate island sightseeing and special tours, which can last from one hour to two hours or

more.

The pilots are an eclectic lot. Experience and backgrounds range from military aviators and retired police pilots to former club “dancers”, the latter trained by Nick personally. They all fly with different styles and perspectives. Clients love the action packed flights. “Blue Coral Copters” has an excellent safety record, no crashes! Well, maybe a few close ones...but who knows? Many clients are repeat customers who return each year for the “special rides”.

Pilots are evaluated based on an interview with Nick Doobie and a check ride in the aircraft. Nick isn't the most proficient pilot in the world, or up on all the rules, but he is a “natural pilot” type guy. Except for causal once a year check rides there isn't much training unless a pilot has an incident that comes to Nick's attention. Standards are a bit relaxed, but everybody kind of gets the idea about what needs to be done and how to fly the aircraft. Besides, Nick only hires people with experience, most of the time. So, training records aren't a big priority with Nick.

Pilots work “kind of a” 10-hour shift”. Everybody loves Nick, the operations and the flying environment, so it's common that pilots will fly more than 10 hours. Some guys work six even seven days a week to make the good bucks. As Nick says, “I can't get these guys and gals to go home even when they are sick!” According to one pilot, “This is “Helo Heaven”!

Crews report for duty and review a clipboard to see their assigned aircraft and the schedule for the day. The pilots conduct a preflight inspection of the aircraft and the day begins. Nick posts any ‘safety stuff’ on the company bulletin board next to the macadamia nut and coffee machine. He also tries to post other information about flying such as contacts for the local fuel guy, the status of the tour areas, maintenance stuff, the daily weather from “Beach News” or DUATS Sometimes he forgets to post anything. Hey, it's Hawaii, what changes?

Nick Doobie believes in safety. He always tells his pilots to check the weather and never be unsafe, but also to be creative before aborting a revenue flight. He instructs the line personnel to be courteous when loading the clients and try to make sure they understand the seatbelts. Man, those dangling seat belts beat the heck out of the side of the aircraft...

Then, there was the cargo door that opened in flight and some of the customer's picnic lunches and cameras blew out. Again, not cool. Once, some flower leis were sucked from a customer's neck into the rotor systems. The customers were a bit surprised, but it wasn't really an issue.

Some engine over-torques occurred when the new pilots over-loaded the helicopter (it was just people pounds) and had to pull extra power to climb out of the steep Mookie Mala Canyon as they went behind the waterfalls. Then there was issue when the new, former ‘dancer’ pilot flew too close to the volcano during the unexpected eruption. Customers loved the “totally hot ride”, but it did sort of trash the paint on helicopter and grit the turbine blades.

Nick doesn't always have time to deal with operations issues; things get busy. Nick appointed one of the pilots to be a “line supervisor and dispatcher” to help with the all the hassles and keep track of the flights. However, between the paperwork, dispatching and then having to take some of the charter flights, the pilot opted back to flying the line.

Just recently, Nick spent a few thousand bucks to install glass digital cockpits in a couple of the helicopters, but not in all of them. Some of the pilots told Nick those different cockpits layouts can be a hassle to figure out when jumping from ship to ship. Nick said to take the instruction manual home and “dial it” in. Besides, helicopter flying is an outside the cockpit operation.

Nick occasionally hears about pilots encountering new hazards out on the tour routes, such as wires, more tour helicopters out there and lousy landing zones at a friend's ranch where Doobie helicopters often land to let folks out to empty the sick sacks. Some of the pilots thought that "pop-out" floats would be a good deal on the helicopters allowing them to fly over the water. Nick was a little shocked at the price of the floats (100k) and instead gave everybody USN surplus life vests with the caveat of, "Stay within gliding distance of the beach." Risk management isn't a big issue unless somebody has a "close one". Usually, something gets worked out or talked about after the fact. Nick's idea of feedback from the line is a laid back chat with the crews on lunch breaks or at the monthly company beach party

Another issue Nick is dealing with is how crowded the ramp is. "Blue Coral Copters" shares the ramp with the maintenance facility where mechanics are working on helicopters and doing test hops. What was once a large open space has now gotten really congested. There are no painted lines for set-down pads so Nick's pilots' just use common sense and good situational awareness. There are a couple of old fences that surround the main passenger pick up pad that Nick's pilots manage by simply doing a high hover over the barrier. A few roller toolboxes have been blown around the pads, but most of the tools were found.

Nick's company never had an accident. Sure, there were a few close calls; a pilot taxied into a coconut tree, another jammed a tail rotor into a fence, and one took off with a tie down strap on the aircraft. On another occasion, a cockpit warning light illuminated in flight and a newer pilot elected to return the aircraft to the base rather than make a precautionary landing, thus saving the company revenue for maintenance call outs.

One pilot had an in-flight systems failure. Although there was a flight manual procedure to deal with the event, the pilot opted to handle the problem his way. Regardless, all ended well. "Blue Coral Copters" flies many hours in contrast to the few incidents mentioned and no one had ever been injured on any flight. Basically, each pilot has their own set of rules dealing with in-flight issues. Nick knows his guys understand risk and hazard. Hey, if you want to be 100 % safe then quit flying!

When it comes to maintenance, things are quite efficient. Mac and his technicians at "Copter Doctors" are really good "wrenches". "Blue Coral Copters" nearly over-flew some required inspections by a couple of hours, but this was not an issue. Mac and Nick have a good working relationship and work out problems in a mutually agreeable manner. Nick and his mechanics know the machines inside and out. Nick has an aircraft squawk sheet, but tells the pilots to call "Copter Doctors" before writing anything up or better yet, just leave a note in the cockpit for the next pilot, unless it's really serious stuff. Basically, it's a "fix and fly" kind of approach. However, Nick always says, "If the aircraft doesn't feel right, then don't fly it!"

Nick is a mellow guy. Reports, safety data, logs and bookkeeping are kept to a minimum. The pilots do the everyday work. Nick signs the checks and tells the pilots to "stay sharp" and always bring their "A game" to the cockpit. "Let's keep it simple and safe" he says, before heading out the door for a mid-day check on the surf conditions. Nick's other credo is, "If you're wired, your fired". Nick doesn't tolerate drugs, booze or smoking.

Everybody at "Blue Coral Copters" was happy, customers and employees alike. Money was

flowing in and Nick Doobie was "Cruisin' the Blue Hawaiian Airwaves." Then one day, a guy walked into the office and said, "My name is Mr. Robinson, I'm from the Federal Aviation Administration."

After getting the 'Big Picture' from the FAA, Nick Doobie was bummed. The FAA guy spoke of rumors that "Blue Coral Copters" had safety management issues. If those rumors were true then the 'Open' sign would quickly change to 'Closed'. Mr. Robinson was coming back in a few weeks to conduct an inspection of the operation. Nick, normally upbeat, was suddenly in the gloom zone.

To unwind from the stress, he grabbed one of the charter flights just to enjoy the scenery and the flying. Alas, this could be the final run for "Blue Coral Copters". During the flight Nick, noticed one of the passengers wearing an ERAU T-shirt. Nick knew about ERAU and asked the lady what she did for ERAU. "I teach safety management" said Ms. Moran with a smile, "And from what I see, you need some lessons on that subject."

Ms. Moran chatted further with Nick and asked him to explain his company's proactive safety management program, communications, line operations, risk/hazard assessment, human factors SMS and a pre-accident plan. Alas, Nick's story was pretty short, but he did have a safety manual! He told her that he made a copy of a safety manual that he bagged from some defunct charter outfit on the Mainland. And, since he didn't plan on having accidents, he just told employees to call 911 and his cell number. Moran flipped through the huge manual and asked Nick if this was current? Nick replied, "Naw, they had it as a CYA thing. Plus, if I operated by all those rules I would never get a helicopter off the ground! "Hey, babe, I'm in the business to make money, not be a static display for helicopters!"

Moran sighed and said, "OK, just maybe, I can help you make the company a bit more safe and up-to-standards". Nick Doobie liked the sound of this and perked up. Maybe he could work with that way-to-serious "FAA dude". Ms. Moran again reassured him, "I think we can pull this together", adding she could write up a safety assessment document in return for a new long board, plus a few hours in the helicopter. With that prospect, Nick Doobie was feelin' good. He jumped up and said, "Here's the keys to beach house, the '49 Woody, and my long board, start writing!"

The ever-optimistic, Nick took the day off and hit the waves. Maybe, this cool lady from ERAU could prevent "Blue Coral Copters" from the big wipe out.

END