



## RECORD OF CONVERSATION

**Howard Plagens**  
**Senior Air Safety Investigator**

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Person Contacted: Wayne Schmitz US Helicopters, Inc.  
Date: 2-27-2008  
Time: 1300  
Phone:  
Subject: LAX07MA231A/B; Eurocopter AS350B2, N613TV, and Eurocopter AS350B2, N215TV, Phoenix, AZ, July 27, 2007

Attendees:

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The following is a summary of the conversation with Mr. Schmitz.

US Helicopters has been in business since 1981. The company owns and operates 46 aircraft in 25 locations. The staffing at each location varies and management performs routine visits. The financial condition of the company is good. Over the last several years, the company has added new programs and more equipment.

They have a good relationship with the FAA. There are no difference areas but US Helicopters has found that the FAA could use additional inspectors. They see inspectors from the FAA routinely.

US Helicopters has a training program and performs annual flight checks. The FAA has approved the training program. The pay is comparable to the industry and the morale is good. Flight and duty times all comply with FAR Part 135. The company has weather minimums. Their pilot in Dallas, Texas, is president of the National Broadcast Pilot's association, which publishes a guideline for electronic news gathering (ENG) operations. They are combining several manual into one new company standard operating procedures manual. Overtime at US Helicopters is rare; however, if it is requested, the employee is paid extra. Sick leave is available, but not commonly used. There is a low turnover rate with employees and management and the reason for turnover varies. The quality of new hires is good. Pre-employment screening is done for new hire candidates as per PRIA guidelines.

US Helicopters does not have a safety committee, but has a safety office incorporated into the operations office. They maintain the safety and operations manuals and reports directly to the Director of Operations. Safety information is communicated to employees via email,

company memos, and person to person. Employees report problems directly to the chief pilot or Director of Operations. There is a way for employees to bring up safety related issues without fear of retribution. Recent safety issues include wind limits, weather minimums, and rotor blade tie downs; the company enacted policies for each of these issues.

The chief pilot has a good overall aviation background, as well as good leadership skills. The Vice President and Chief Executive Officer also have good overall aviation experience as well as leadership skills.

Maintenance is normally done by company maintenance personnel with 1-2 mechanics at each location. If maintenance is not done through US Helicopters, local contractors or maintenance facilities are used. The maintenance is performed in accordance with FAA and manufacturer standards.

The company has experienced three previous accidents, and one violation is on record. The violation was described as minor. Normally when an accident occurs, the events leading up to the accident are reviewed, company managers meet, and any changes that are necessary are then adopted. Incidents are reported to the Director of Operators and/or General Manager. As a result of a recent incident, full touchdown autorotations are no longer permitted during routine training flights. US Helicopters participates in industry safety meetings and organizations.

US Helicopters does not keep a safety database; however, they perform periodic reviews and observations and employ safety audits both internally and externally.

Mr. Smith's primary job was as a pilot for US Helicopters. He had been employed by US Helicopters since October of 2005. He had been working in the Phoenix area since his hire date. Since his arrival, the pilot had flown about 1,000 hours, with an average of 45 hours per month. Prior to working for US Helicopters, the pilot worked for McMahon Helicopter Service in Detroit. The pilot was not unfamiliar to US Helicopter management; they had talked to him for a couple of years prior to having a position to put him in.

For the 72 hours leading up to the accident, he worked a standard schedule from 0530-1430. He normally had weekends off. He was not married, and he did not have children. Mr. Smith owned a house in the Phoenix area. He had not been involved in any previous accidents, nor had he been disciplined for performance. US Helicopters was not aware of the pilots sleeping and eating habits in the days leading up to the accident.

The pilot's medical certificate did not reveal any changes to the pilot's medical condition. US Helicopters did not know if the pilot used alcohol or drugs, although the pilot was enrolled in US Helicopter's random drug testing program. It was unknown if Mr. Smith had any major changes in his health, financial situation or personal life over the last year

There were no known problems with the helicopter prior to the accident.

  
Wayne Schmitz

Date: 2-27-08