

February 25, 2021

Mr. Stephen Dickson
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration

The attached letter from the NTSB Chairman provides information about the NTSB's February 9, 2021, report *Rapid Descent Into Terrain, Island Express Helicopters Inc., Sikorsky S-76B, N72EX, Calabasas, California, January 26, 2020, AAR-21-01*. The details of this accident investigation and the resulting safety recommendations may be found in the attached report, which can also be accessed at <http://www.nts.gov>.

The NTSB is vitally interested in these recommendations because they are designed to prevent accidents and save lives. We would appreciate a response within 90 days of the date of this letter, detailing the actions you have taken or intend to take to implement these recommendations. When replying, please refer to the safety recommendations by number (for example, A-21-5 and -6). We encourage you to submit your response to ExecutiveSecretariat@nts.gov. If your reply exceeds 20 megabytes, including attachments, please e-mail us at the same address for instructions on how to send larger documents. Please do not submit both an electronic copy and a hard copy of the same response.



Executive Secretariat-crb

Office of the Managing Director

National Transportation Safety Board

490 L'Enfant Plaza SW

Washington, DC 20594

Email: ExecutiveSecretariat@nts.gov



Office of the Chairman

National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, DC 20594

February 25, 2021

Mr. Stephen Dickson
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Mr. Dickson:

This letter provides information about the National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) February 9, 2021, report *Rapid Descent Into Terrain, Island Express Helicopters Inc., Sikorsky S-76B, N72EX, Calabasas, California, January 26, 2020, AAR-21-01*. The details of this accident investigation and the resulting safety recommendations may be found in the attached report, which can also be accessed at <http://www.nts.gov>.

As a result of this investigation, we identified the following safety issues:

- The pilot's preflight weather and flight risk planning.
- The flight's entry into instrument meteorological conditions and the pilot's inadequate adverse weather avoidance.
- The pilot's spatial disorientation.
- Influences on the pilot's decision to continue the flight into adverse weather.
- Island Express' incomplete implementation of its safety management system (SMS).
- The benefits of a mandatory SMS.
- The benefits of flight simulation devices for pilot training in adverse weather avoidance.
- The benefits of a flight data monitoring program.
- The value of crash-resistant flight recorder systems in preventing future accidents.

Accordingly, the NTSB makes the following safety recommendations to the FAA. Additional information regarding these recommendations can be found in the noted sections of the report.

- Require the use of appropriate simulation devices during initial and recurrent pilot training for Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 135 helicopter operations to provide scenario-based training that addresses the decision-making, skills, and

procedures needed to recognize and respond to changing weather conditions in flight, identify and apply mitigation strategies for avoiding adverse weather, practice the transition to the use of flight instruments to reduce the risk of spatial disorientation, and maintain awareness of a variety of influences that can adversely affect pilot decision-making. (A-21-5) (See section 2.5.)

- Convene a multidisciplinary panel of aircraft performance, human factors, and aircraft operations specialists to evaluate spatial disorientation simulation technologies to determine which applications are most effective for training pilots to recognize the onset of spatial disorientation and successfully mitigate it, and make public a report on the committee’s findings. (A-21-6) (See section 2.5.)

In addition, the NTSB reiterates the following recommendations to the FAA:

- After the action in Safety Recommendation A-16-34 is completed, require all 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 135 operators to establish a structured flight data monitoring program that reviews all available data sources to identify deviations from established norms and procedures and other potential safety issues. (A-16-35) (See section 2.6.)
- Require all 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 135 operators to establish safety management system programs. (A-16-36) (See section 2.4.2.)

In the same report, we also classified two previously issued safety recommendations:

- Require all 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 135 operators to install flight data recording devices capable of supporting a flight data monitoring program. (A-16-34, classified “Open—Unacceptable Response” in section 2.6)
- Require all existing turbine-powered, nonexperimental, nonrestricted-category aircraft that are not equipped with a flight data recorder or cockpit voice recorder and are operating under 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Parts 91, 121, or 135 to be retrofitted with a crash-resistant flight recorder system. The crash-resistant flight recorder system should record cockpit audio and images with a view of the cockpit environment to include as much of the outside view as possible, and parametric data per aircraft and system installation, all as specified in Technical Standard Order C197, “Information Collection and Monitoring Systems.” (A-13-13, classified “Open—Unacceptable Response” in section 2.7)

The NTSB is vitally interested in these recommendations because they are designed to prevent accidents and save lives. We would appreciate a response within 90 days of the date of this letter, detailing the actions you have taken or intend to take to implement these recommendations. When replying, please refer to the safety recommendations by number (Safety Recommendations A-21-5 and -6. We encourage you to submit your response to ExecutiveSecretariat@ntsb.gov. If

your reply, including attachments, exceeds 20 megabytes, please e-mail us at the same address for instructions. Please do not submit both an electronic copy and a hard copy of the same response.

Sincerely,

[Original Signed]

Robert L. Sumwalt, III
Chairman

February 25, 2021

Mr. Phillip DiFiore
President
Island Express Helicopters Inc.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation—railroad, highway, marine, and pipeline. We determine the probable cause of the accidents and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, we carry out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinate the resources of the federal government and other organizations to provide assistance to victims and their family members affected by major transportation disasters.

The attached letter from the NTSB Chairman provides information about the NTSB's February 9, 2021, report *Rapid Descent Into Terrain, Island Express Helicopters Inc., Sikorsky S-76B, N72EX, Calabasas, California, January 26, 2020, AAR-21-01*. The details of this accident investigation and the resulting safety recommendations may be found in the attached report, which can also be accessed at <http://www.nts.gov>. For more information about NTSB and our recommendation process, please see the attached one-page summary.

The NTSB is vitally interested in these recommendations because they are designed to prevent accidents and save lives. We would appreciate a response within 90 days of the date of this letter, detailing the actions you have taken or intend to take to implement these recommendations. When replying, please refer to the safety recommendations by number (for example, A-21-7 and -8). We encourage you to submit your response to ExecutiveSecretariat@nts.gov. If your reply exceeds 20 megabytes, including attachments, please e-mail us at the same address for instructions on how to send larger documents. Please do not submit both an electronic copy and a hard copy of the same response.

All communications regarding safety recommendations will be stored by the NTSB and viewable by the public. Please do not send privileged or confidential communications in response to this/these recommendation(s). Responses marked as confidential or privileged (or similar designations) will be considered nonresponsive. If you have concerns about this protocol, please contact us at ExecutiveSecretariat@nts.gov.



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National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, DC 20594

Office of the Chairman

February 25, 2021

Mr. Phillip DiFiore
President
Island Express Helicopters Inc.
67 D Street
Fillmore, California 93015

Dear Mr. DiFiore:

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation—railroad, highway, marine, and pipeline. We determine the probable cause of the accidents and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, we carry out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinate the resources of the federal government and other organizations to assist victims and their family members affected by major transportation disasters.

We are providing the following information to urge Island Express Helicopters Inc. to act on the safety recommendations in this letter because we believe your organization can help reduce the risk of future accidents. For more information about the NTSB and our recommendation process, please see the attached one-page summary.

This letter also includes information about our February 9, 2021, report *Rapid Descent Into Terrain, Island Express Helicopters Inc., Sikorsky S-76B, N72EX, Calabasas, California, January 26, 2020*, AAR-21-01. The details of this accident investigation and the resulting safety recommendations may be found in the attached report, which can also be accessed at <http://www.nts.gov>.

As a result of this investigation, we identified the following safety issues:

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- The benefits of a mandatory SMS.
- The benefits of flight simulation devices for pilot training in adverse weather avoidance.
- The benefits of a flight data monitoring program.
- The value of crash-resistant flight recorder systems in preventing future accidents.

Accordingly, the NTSB makes the following safety recommendations to Island Express Helicopters Inc. Additional information regarding these recommendations can be found in the noted sections of the report.

Participate in the Federal Aviation Administration's Safety Management System Voluntary Program. (A-21-7) (See section 2.4.2.)

Install flight data recording devices capable of supporting a flight data monitoring (FDM) program on each helicopter in your fleet and establish an FDM program that reviews all available data sources to identify deviations from established norms and procedures as well as other potential safety issues. (A-21-8) (See section 2.6.)

The NTSB is vitally interested in these recommendations because they are designed to prevent accidents and save lives. We would appreciate a response within 90 days of the date of this letter, detailing the actions you have taken or intend to take to implement these recommendations. When replying, please refer to the safety recommendations by number (Safety Recommendations A-21-7 and -8). We encourage you to submit your response to ExecutiveSecretariat@ntsb.gov. If your reply, including attachments, exceeds 20 megabytes, please e-mail us at the same address for instructions on how to send larger documents. Please do not submit both an electronic copy and a hard copy of the same response.

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Sincerely,

[Original Signed]

Robert L. Sumwalt, III
Chairman