

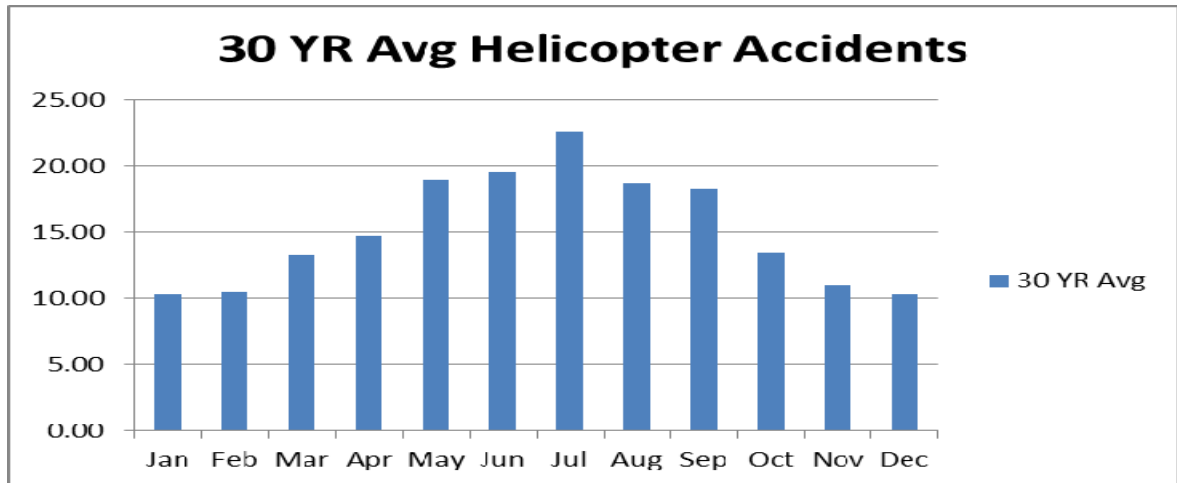
# 101 Critical Days of Summer

By Scott Tyrrell (IHST team member)

The 101 critical days of summer are here and we need to be prepared and to be more vigilant.

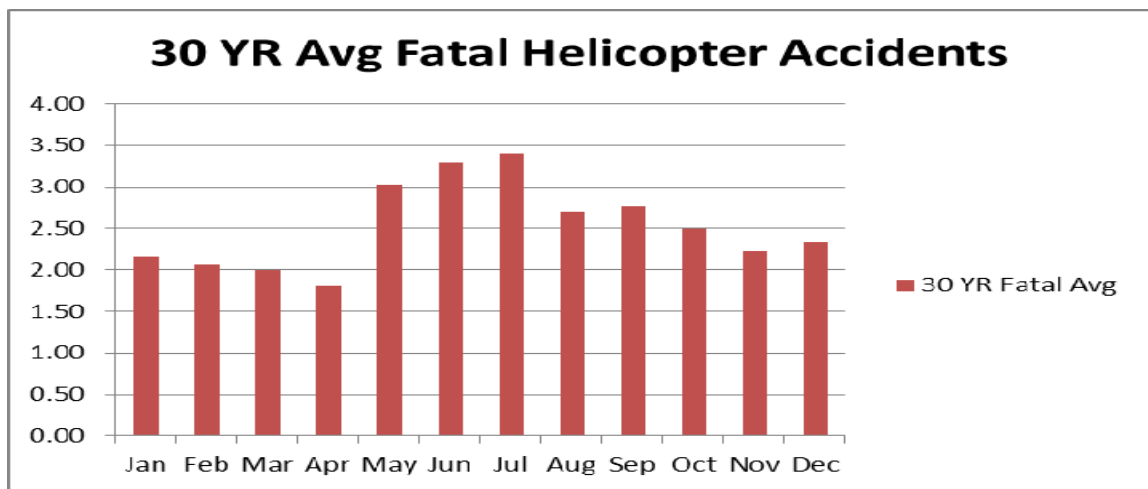
Numerous years of safety statistics show that pilots are statistically more likely to be involved in an off-duty accident during the 101 days of summer. In the United States, that's Memorial Day weekend through the Labor Day weekend. Since 1983, the U.S. helicopter industry has averaged 19.6 accidents per month during these 101 critical days of summer. This is 65 percent higher than the months outside of the 101 critical days (11.9 accidents per month). Comparing fatal helicopter accidents, the monthly average since 1983 is 3.0 fatal accidents during the 101 critical days of summer as compared to 2.2 fatal accidents in the non-summer months. Regardless of true statistical significance, the increase of nearly one fatal accident per month during the summer months will ALWAYS have real life significance for the pilots and passengers who lost their lives and for their remaining family members.

During the summer, there are more occasions to have a great time in great weather, but with an increased aviation activity level, there is a potentially greater chance for more accidents to happen. Three decades of U.S. accident statistics show this to be true:



The forecast for this summer is troubling. During the first five months of calendar year 2013, the U.S. civilian helicopter industry has experienced a worrisome helicopter accident count. Total helicopter accidents for the first five months of 2013 stand at 52, and the average per month is 10.4 accidents. If the U.S. helicopter industry maintains its 30-year average for those inclusive months during the next 101 critical days, we will add an additional 79.2 accidents to the cumulative total through Labor Day 2013 and another 34.8 accidents through the remainder of the year. This would create a total of 166 accidents and place 2013 among the

worst during the past decade. This is not a noteworthy safety statistic to be celebrated and placed in the record books. In the category of fatal accidents, if we do not change the course, we can expect to have more than 30 fatal accidents with approximately 69 fatalities during 2013.



Often in aviation we create memorials for those who have lost their lives while performing their duties, and this is admirable. However, the real heroes are those pilots who perform consistently and flawlessly and create the opportunity to safely leave the earth and most importantly return without error. Too many memorials are filled with pilots who recklessly sacrificed their lives and, perhaps more tragically, the lives of their crew and passengers.

This past U.S. Memorial Day weekend, the lives of two people were cut short in a single helicopter accident near Wheatland, Missouri. In the aftermath, the respective families were left with the grave duty of caring for the victims' memorials and funeral services. We should reserve Memorial Day for those U.S. military men and women who lost their lives fighting for their country versus those who have died in an aviation accident.

From a U.S. military perspective, the 101 Critical Days of Summer is an aviation safety campaign that is very familiar to those who have served in the United States Air Force. The Air Force has designated May 25 – Sept. 4 this year as the "Critical Days" for aviation safety. Their vision for 2013 is to ensure all of their airmen have zero preventable fatal mishaps and an injury-free summer. With this worthy goal in mind, what can we as a civilian helicopter industry learn from the military? Can our civil helicopter community fly this summer focused on excellent Aeronautical Decision Making (ADM), on making accurate risk assessments, on precision flight maneuvers, and with a vigilant passion for safety?

At a minimum, pilots should visit the International Helicopter Safety Team (IHST) website ([www.IHST.org](http://www.IHST.org)) and see the many reports, safety leaflets, and toolkits available to them. They also should equip themselves with great tips, tools and techniques from the FAA Safety Team (FAAST), the Helicopter Association International (HAI), and the Helicopter Association of Canada (HAC).

With the U.S. Memorial Day weekend officially behind us, we can unofficially kick off the 101 Critical Days of Summer for helicopter flying. Using many available IHST safety resources, let's focus on a summer with few accidents and is free from fatalities.

The true meaning of Memorial Day focuses on remembering the men and women who died while serving in the United States Armed Forces. The origins of the holiday stem from Decoration Day which was established in the 1860s to commemorate the Union and Confederate soldiers who died in the Civil War. Now in the 21st century, Memorial Day had been extended to honor all Americans who have died while in the military service. Let's honor America's heroes by flying safely this summer!

*Scott Tyrrell, a retired U.S. Air National Guard officer, is a Continued Operations Safety Specialist and Accident Investigator in the FAA Rotorcraft Directorate. During his military career his experience included over 20+ years in aircraft maintenance including extensive knowledge of aircraft maintenance (F-16, T-43A and C-130). He served as the Commander of an Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Logistics Readiness Squadron and a Mission Support Group. His helicopter accident investigation experience has included 11 major accidents including two NTSB Go-Team investigations, one NTSB Board accident and one international investigation.*