

Are You A Safety Leader?

By Keith Johnson, ALEA Safety Program Manager

One of the most important responsibilities of every member of a law enforcement unit is to promote safety. Every crewmember, unit manager and commander must be at the tip of the spear in promoting safety.

Safety must be recognized as a "core value." Procedures, practices, training and the allocation of resources must clearly demonstrate management's commitment to safety. Effective methods to promote safety include establishing a safety management system (SMS). This includes publishing a statement in the form of a safety policy of the OIC's commitment to safety.

This should be one of the first actions of a new OIC. It does not require that the OIC have any aviation experience. It should communicate that safety is the highest priority and that accomplishing the mission is a lower priority. It should identify risk management as the mechanism to ensure that everyone should conform to the following safety principles:

- Always operate in the safest manner practicable.
- Have a culture of open reporting of hazards in which management will not initiate disciplinary action against any personnel who in good faith disclose a hazard or safety incident due to unintentional conduct.
- Inform every person that they should never take unnecessary risks.
- Ensure that everyone is responsible for the identification and management of risk.
- Remember that safe does not mean risk free. Hazards are present in every element of the organization, including flight operations, training and maintenance.

The OIC should create a budget that demonstrates management's commitment to safety and must include training for everyone in the organization, including initial and recurrent in human factors, risk management and crew resource management.

Training requirements should mandate that everyone in the organization receive this training as soon as practicable after joining the organization. This training is available through ALEA annual conferences, ALEA regional safety seminars, state accreditation training, professional schools and in-house training. Many established law enforcement units conduct regular training courses that they make available to other agencies.

Management must address incidents of intentional non-compliance with standards. Managers should communicate that there is a clear distinction between honest mistakes and intentional non-compliance with standards. Honest mistakes occur, and they should be addressed through counseling and training.

Leaders need to recognize that rewarding people is a key component of their responsibilities. But reward systems are often upside down. Reinforced bad behavior breeds continued bad behavior. This is unacceptable. Leaders must be committed to the principle that people should be rewarded for normal, positive performance of their duties when in compliance with organization standards. People should not be rewarded for accomplishing the mission by breaking the rules.

Research has shown that most accidents include some form of flawed decision-making. This most often involves a variation of non-compliance with known standards. Non-compliance rarely results in an accident; however, it always results in greater risk for the operation. Managers should recognize the following conclusions:

- Compliance with known procedures produces known outcomes.
- Compliance with standards helps guarantee repeatable results.
- Bad rules produce bad results.
- Complacency affects the safe operation of the aircraft and cannot be tolerated.
- Standards are mechanisms for change.
- The hardest thing to do and the right thing to do are often the same thing.

Leaders are responsible for recognizing factors that cause accidents and communicating pertinent information to everyone in the organization. The International Helicopter Safety Team recently published the report of the Joint Helicopter Safety Analysis Team that analyzed 197 accidents and concluded that in law enforcement, pilot judgment and actions were the leading problem category in 77 percent of the accidents.

In four accidents, improper landing site selection or reconnaissance was identified as a problem. In three accidents, pilots disregarded cues that should have led to the termination of a course of action or maneuver. Perceptual judgment errors or failure to follow procedures was a problem in three accidents. Inappropriate aircraft handling or inadequate power management was identified in three accidents. Unsafe flight profiles were identified as a problem in two accidents. Inadequate response to common aerodynamic phenomena (LTE and dynamic rollover) and inadequate autorotations were also problems identified in this category. Inadequate and belated instructor action to correct student action was cited in one accident. Management must objectively evaluate the knowledge, skills, judgment and experience of unit certified flight instructors. Low-time instructors should receive additional training before teaching emergency procedures.

Safety culture was cited as a problem in 54 percent of the accidents. This included lack of management oversight and insufficient aircraft and pilot monitoring. Also included were inadequate pilot experience and training. Management should be challenged to directly observe aircrews performing their duties. Supervisors should periodically fly with their people. Flight operations around the home base should be monitored. And deviations from accepted practices and standards should be identified and immediately corrected.

Maintenance issues were identified in 46 percent of the accidents. Problems included failure to comply with approved maintenance procedures and lack of quality assurance oversight to detect improper maintenance or impending failures.

Most newly assigned law enforcement OICs have no prior aviation experience. They are not pilots, and most will never be pilots. This places unique demands on their ability to lead and manage. Therefore, they should receive safety training prior to or as soon as practicable after joining their aviation unit. This training is available at the 2008 ALEA Annual Conference to be held in Houston, TX. The Unit Manager Course is tailored for the new OIC. Other courses include the Safety Management System Course and Human Factors Course.

The OIC and his/her leadership skill are key to having a safe, effective and efficient aviation program. Be prepared - be a leader. Additional information on safety leadership can be found on the ALEA website at

[www.alea.org/public/safety/
SMS-Toolkit.pdf](http://www.alea.org/public/safety/SMS-Toolkit.pdf).