

By Matt Johnson

## BRIEF THY PASSENGERS

Brief them as their lives depend on it, because it may very well be life-saving information in the unfortunate event of an accident or incident.

For those of us who frequently fly commercially on airliners, it isn't uncommon to know verbatim what verbiage will likely be coming out of the flight attendant's mouth. We sit with a "been there – done that – know this" mentality as we patiently wait to get on with our journey to our destination.

Yet, in the general aviation world in which many of us operate, the responsibility of conducting passenger briefings falls under our responsibility—and what a huge responsibility it is! While I won't specifically cite the regulations, I want to bring your attention to requirements for a passenger-briefing found in the Airman Certification Standards (ACS). In both the private and commercial ACS, under Area of Operation II (Preflight Procedures), specifically Task B "Flight Deck Management," you will find one knowledge area that pertains specifically: "Passenger Briefing Requirements, Including Operation and Required Use of Safety Restraint Systems." In the Skills area (required), you will find that you must be able to:

*"Conduct an appropriate passenger briefing, including identifying the pilot-in-command (PIC), use of safety belts, shoulder harnesses, doors, passenger conduct, rotor-blade avoidance, and emergency procedure."*

So, you must be prepared to treat the DPE as a passenger and provide him or her with an adequate briefing on checkride day.

Remember, it is your responsibility as PIC to ensure you meet the requirements and, as with most things in aviation, acronyms have found their way into this process to help you remember what should be covered. More than a decade ago, in an edition of the FAA's "Safety Briefing Magazine," an article was published on this very topic. It was well written and well received, and is still useful today with its core acronym: "SAFETY." Let's delve into this acronym, and you may tweak it as you see fit as I have done here from its original publication.

### Seatbelts

Briefing your passengers not only on when to use them, but also on how to properly fasten and unfasten them is paramount. Having passengers physically open/close doors, for example, is

a lot more useful than any verbal explanation. Don't just tell— show them!

### Air

The aim of "air" is to focus on environmental controls for fresh air, or heat or conditioned air for sweltering summer days. Unless the passenger has some familiarity with environmental controls for the particular helicopter we are flying, I don't want them touching anything simply because many ventilation controls in helicopters are of the push/pull cable type and the last thing I want a passenger doing is touching anything of that sort when they may be in close proximity to other push/pull cable-type mechanisms (fuel mixture, etc.) Another consideration of "air" is for operations with doors off. Passengers should be advised to keep extremities inside the aircraft, and to secure their equipment (camera straps, etc.). What about the unfortunate experience of air sickness? It's best to point out how to access those sick-sacks prior to takeoff, rather than figure it out midflight with a queasy passenger.

### Fire extinguisher

Simply point out the locations of any fire extinguishers mounted in the aircraft, how to remove them from their mounts, and the elementary basics of their operation.

### Equipment / Evacuation

This is a good place to discuss equipment, such as "doors," and how they operate. Have a good discussion about how and when to exit in both normal conditions and in the event of an emergency evacuation. In which direction

will the passengers exit? Where is the "meet-up" point, etc.? If there is any survival equipment in the helicopter, point it out and provide pertinent information about it.

### Traffic & Talking

We all know how important the see-and-avoid concept is. With passenger(s), you now have extra eyes to help with the see-and-avoid strategy. A personal rule of mine is that "no eyeballs ride for free," and I take the time to explain to passengers exactly what I need to be aware of and how to do that safely. What about talking? Nervous passengers often talk and talk a lot! It is a coping mechanism for the anxiety they are experiencing. Explain to them the "sterile" flight deck concept and touch on critical phases of flight like takeoff and landing.

### Your questions

Finally, this is their opportunity to ask you questions and to ensure they understand that there are no "dumb questions" and that their safety is of utmost importance.

Don't skimp on the passenger safety briefing; it truly can make a difference.



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