

SAFETY FIRST

Children's Memorial Hospital Heliport Proposal Fact Sheet (5/25/09)

What is CMH's Heliport Proposal?

- Construct a rooftop heliport, which will sit at a height equivalent to the 31st story of nearby residential buildings.
- Allow semi-regulated services/providers to take off and land 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. 70% of the flights occur between 8 am and 9 pm. 30% of the flights occur between 9 pm and 8 am.
- Allow individual pilots to decide on a flight-by-flight basis whether it is "safe" to fly. A single patient may require a pilot to make up to multiple takeoffs and landings. 50% of CMH's patient transports require 2 takeoffs and 2 landings. 50% of CMH's patient transports require 1 takeoff and 1 landing.
- Transfer patients from hospital to hospital as well as pick up patients directly from accident sites.

What is the status of CMH's proposal?

- CMH's rooftop heliport proposal **has not been approved.**
- The public safety risks of this proposal have not been evaluated by the hospital, the City of Chicago, the FAA or the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) who has the responsibility for aviation safety in Illinois.
- IDOT has acknowledged that it has never before reviewed a heliport at this elevation. IDOT performed an initial feasibility study of the proposal three months after CMH had announced its intent to build a new facility on Chicago Avenue.
- The FAA was made aware of CMH's proposal 17 months after CMH's announcement. The FAA was never asked to evaluate CMH's intended location against the FAA's recommended criteria for hospital heliport site selection. The FAA refused to comment on this subject.
- The FAA did review CMH's application. In making its determination that helicopter operations could be conducted "safely" from this heliport the FAA did not evaluate or even document the public safety risks of the proposal. In addition, the FAA:
 - Did not know that single-engine aircraft would be permitted to takeoff and land at the facility
 - Did not know that the heliport would be operated at night
 - Did not evaluate alternative heliport locations because it was not asked to do so
 - Did not assess the safety records of the helicopter operators that would be flying in and out of the heliport because it is not required to do so
 - Did not consider wind or weather conditions along the flight paths because it is not required to do so
 - Did not address the need for designated emergency landing areas because it is not required to do so
 - Refused to comment on whether CMH's proposal was wise

The FAA reviewed only the two proposed flight paths at a single specific angle and would not comment on the safety of pilots deviating even a few feet from these specific flight paths/ angles as it was not asked to do so. Pilots are not restricted to specific flight paths and can fly anywhere over Streeterville at any altitude they choose.

- Independent, highly qualified aviation safety and aerospace engineering experts have raised serious and significant safety issues and concerns with CMH's proposal. **IDOT has been made aware of these issues but has not yet defined how it will address them.**
- IDOT's public hearing on the proposal is scheduled to begin Wednesday, July 22nd at 6:00 pm. The hearing will continue the evenings of July 23rd and 24th, and the afternoon of Saturday July 25th as necessary. The location for the hearing has not yet been determined. After the public hearing, IDOT will review all of the information presented, prior to making any decisions regarding CMH's heliport request.

New York City Does Not Allow Rooftop Heliports

- In 1977, there were 4 fatalities, 1 serious injury and 17 minor injuries from a rooftop heliport accident on top of the Pan Am building in Manhattan. Operating rotor blades caused all four fatalities. A pedestrian, two blocks away, sustained fatal injuries from rotor blades ricocheting off the heliport.

Northwestern Memorial Hospital Attempted This Before

- In 1986, Northwestern Memorial Hospital proposed putting a heliport on top of a building located across the street from the building currently being constructed by CMH. Northwestern Memorial Hospital withdrew its proposal when it was determined that the heliport could be used safely only 40% of the time based on historic wind and weather patterns at the site.
- Since 1986, 34 new residential high-rises have been constructed in Streeterville—and more are on the way-- increasing the number of vertical obstructions and adding complexity to neighborhood's wind conditions, while eliminating potential suitable locations for emergency landings to occur should the need arise.

There is a Safer Alternative to the Proposed Rooftop Heliport

- Alderman Reilly proposed a safer existing heliport alternative to CMH. The alternative heliport is located just south of Navy Pier. It provides a significantly larger landing surface at ground level and is located adjacent to – not in the middle of – a densely populated environment. Vertical obstructions are located some distance away.

This is a National Safety Issue

- 2008 was the deadliest year ever for medical helicopter operations. There were 13¹ medical helicopter accidents in which 28 people died, including 5 patients.
- Four of the 2008 medical helicopter accidents occurred at or within one mile of a hospital heliport raining debris on the surrounding neighborhoods. Debris was scattered up to ¼ of a mile from the point of impact.
- 2008 was not an anomaly. Since 1998, an average of 13.5 medical helicopter accidents have occurred each year. Based on the number of medical helicopter aircraft, this would be roughly equivalent to a major US airline having one accident per month.
- NTSB accident data show that 77% of medical helicopter accidents can be related to some form of human error.²
- A 10-year average shows that dedicated medical helicopter personnel have the highest risk of fatality of any occupation in the United States.³
- The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has stated that the emergency medical helicopter accident rate is alarming and unacceptable and convened a four-day hearing in February 2009 to discuss this important public safety issue.

¹ 14 aircraft were involved in 13 accidents in 2008. One 2008 accident was the result of two medical helicopters colliding in mid-air.

² Dr. Ira Blumen, Program Director for the University of Chicago Aeromedical Network, Testimony at the NTSB Public Hearing in the Matter of the Issues on Emergency medical Services Helicopter Operational Safety, 2/3/09.

³ IBID