



TOPS
Tour Operators Program of Safety

Fall 2015

NewsGram

TOPS Board

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TOPS's New Focus Taking Shape

In 2016, TOPS will celebrate 20 years of contributions to helicopter tour safety. We're taking advantage of this positive milestone to refresh and refocus TOPS in preparation for an exciting new era for the organization.

While its founders worked on the idea and concept of a way to increase helicopter tour safety, it wasn't until January 1996 that TOPS was officially incorporated. At that time it was an organization of competing helicopter tour operators who recognized collaborating on safety benefited everyone. The program was formed to raise the bar on helicopter tour safety and provide a collaborative environment where the industry's most experienced tour operators could share safety ideas, information and best practices.

In the past 20 years TOPS operators have enjoyed the benefits of increased safety with much lower accident rates than the industry on a whole. Relationships with the FAA and NTSB developed and grew to a point where both agencies collaborate with TOPS on safety rules and recommendations. And membership has steadily grown as the program continues to build and grow organically with the changing helicopter industry.

Today, the TOPS Board of Directors is working on refocusing TOPS from the bottom up – reviewing and strengthening the mission and priorities of TOPS to increase understanding of the value of the program. While we work internally toward a goal of zero accidents, our new marketing efforts simultaneously build public awareness as we move toward a day when tour booking agencies and the general public demand tours only with TOPS operators.

Some of the many new and exciting things you'll see as a part of this effort is a redesigned NewsGram, a new logo, new brochures, a new general newsletter, and a brand new website. Read on to learn about our efforts and get all the details on how to access the vastly improved and user-friendly new website.

Important TOPS Dates

TOPS General Membership Meeting: Feb. 29, 2016, 1 - 3 p.m.
Heli-Expo 2016 in Louisville, Ky.
Location: TBD

TOPS Spring Meeting: Spring 2016
The Board of Directors recommends a spring meeting and will solicit member input at the General Membership Meeting.
Location: Tentatively - Denali, Alaska

TOPS Fall Meeting Overview and Highlights

Meeting Overview

The minutes of the 2015 Fall Meeting are located in the Members Only section of the new website, www.topssafety.org.

In addition to the committee reports below, TOPS Audit Committee chair John Becker gave a brief overview of the HAI UAV (unmanned aerial vehicles) committee he's been appointed to and how the industry, including tour operators, should be paying close attention to UAVs, UAV legislation, and ways to embrace the technology.

ARGUS/PRISM gave a demonstration of their online audit product at the request of the board and is working on a demo version for TOPS to consider in order to make the audit process easier for operators and auditors.

The membership also discussed outlining an official procedure regarding suspending members who are out of compliance. The Standardization Committee will review options and present a recommended procedure at the next meeting.

Other discussion topics included capturing institutional knowledge within operators and TOPS. It was recommended an advisory committee be formed of those key people who have contributed to the development and growth of TOPS.

Committee Updates

Standardization

The committee suggested term limits for a committee chair should be determined by the members of each committee. Additionally, the committee is looking into an online software solution for managing audits as well as updating the TOPS mentoring program to simplify the mentorship process for prospective new members. The committee will have a new mentoring process spelled out for the Heli-Expo meeting as well as lead member discussion around doors off operations at the meeting.

Directors of Safety

The Directors of Safety committee has been working on identifying how TOPS can create a stewardship program to help members develop and expand their SMS programs. The committee will also be working toward realigning TOPS, or at least referencing TOPS items with the pillars and elements of SMS programs, scouring other SMS and accreditation programs for best practices that might

be incorporated into the TOPS program, and leverage whatever pressure TOPS can to get Hawaii FAA weather cameras online.

Directors of Maintenance Committee

The Directors of Maintenance Committee continues to refine the F.O.D. Control Guidelines for inclusion into the program of safety. Additionally, the committee would like to look into duty times for maintenance staff, identifying standards TOPS might be able to incorporate that will work for all members.

Audit Committee

The Audit Committee reported all 2015 audits went well and all but one member was recommended for continued membership. The one member that did not meet current TOPS standards, Helicopter Flight Services, is working with the FAA to rectify the issue and TOPS looks forward to welcoming them back once the issue is resolved. In preparation for 2016, be on the lookout for an email from John Becker soliciting recommendations for areas of special interest to be included in the next audit. TOPS Best Practices for 2015 were shared, posted to the website and distributed via email to the membership.

Website Committee

The Website Committee unveiled the new website and logo. With this work done, the committee has been renamed the Marketing Committee and will continue their work as they assist in designing a new brochure to support marketing efforts and identify opportunities to better market the organization.

Committee Leadership

Audit Committee, John Becker, john@papillon.com

Safety Committee, Joel Kain, joel.kain@surveypt.com

Maintenance Committee, Troy Atkinson, tatkinson@bluehawaiian.com

Standardization, Eric Lincoln, elincoln@bluehawaiian.com

Marketing, Geoff Edlund, geoff@papillon.com

Nomination, Amanda Nelson, anelson@erahelicopters.com

20th Anniversary Plans

January 2016 marks TOPS's 20th anniversary as an official organization. The TOPS Board and Executive Director have already begun work on how to increase visibility of TOPS through anniversary celebrations and recognition. TOPS will exhibit at the 2016 Heli-Expo, adding a special banner this year advertising the 20th anniversary. The board is also working on options for a celebration to take place at the show. Additionally, TOPS Executive Director Jen Boyer is crafting a press release and actively pitching media to help secure stories about TOPS in magazine issues that will come out at Heli-Expo, as well as work to get media to interview TOPS leaders at the show. The Board is reviewing the Executive Director's year-long public relations and visibility campaign to help not only increase industry knowledge of TOPS, but also increase membership while also building public knowledge of TOPS to the point where the public demand a TOPS operator for their tours.

New Website & Logo Unveiled

In conjunction with the 20th and as a part of the overall plan to refresh the TOPS brand and focus while bringing TOPS to the next level, the Website Committee created and presented a new TOPS logo and website at the Fall Meeting. The Board approved it unanimously and it has now gone live. To access the members only site, please go to (link) to set up your new password.



Features of the new site include:

- Properly aligned name www.topssafety.org (the old domain, topsafety.org, redirects to the new site)
- Clean look
- Easy navigation for three key visitors: the public, potential members and members
- Calls to action – join, choose a TOPS operator for your next tour, sign up for our newsletter, log in
- Better visibility for our members
- Members only pages that include easy to find information, and audit toolbox for all audit information and documents, and discussion forums (including private forums for committees)

Congratulations Elling

Our own Elling Halvorson was honored in October during the Museum of Flight's 34th Annual Pathfinder Awards. Every year the Seattle-based museum honors Northwest visionaries that have made significant contributions to the development of the aerospace industry. Elling received the prestigious Pathfinder Award alongside former Boeing executive and Ford Motor Company CEO Alan Mulally and the late NASA astronaut Michael P. Anderson.



Elling, a resident of Kirkland, Wash., was recognized for his significant contributions to helicopter aviation, tourism and safety. Founder of Grand Canyon Helicopters, a founding member of the Tour Operators Program of Safety (TOPS), a catalyst in the development of quiet helicopter technology, and a former chairman of the Helicopter Association International, Halvorson has significantly shaped today's helicopter industry.

TOPS sent out a press release to the aviation industry to help promote this great honor and received great media coverage for Elling and TOPS as it mentioned his work to create TOPS 20 years ago.

Meet Boardmember Gordy Cox

At our Oct. 23 meeting, TOPS Chair Craig Jennison appointed Gordy Cox of Island Express Helicopters to the board, filling the position opened by Heidi Rota of Sundance Helicopters.



Heidi was elected to her position last winter during the General Membership Meeting in Orlando. Later last spring Heidi left Sundance. Gordy will serve the remainder of Heidi's term, which is through to the 2017 General Membership Meeting.

Gordy brings a wealth of information to the TOPS Board. Currently the director of operations at Island Express, he also has significant safety management experience as well as piloting skill in a variety of helicopter operations. He's flown and managed some fascinating work around the world (ask him about satellite launches from the middle of the Pacific on the equator). He's excited to share his thoughts, knowledge and experience as a board member.