

## TOPS Board

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## Welcome New Board Members

With the 2016 board elections, TOPS welcomed two new regular member directors, Mark Schlaefli, Director of Operations at **Sundance Helicopters**, and John Becker, Chief Operating Officer and Director of Operations at **Papillon**.

Mark Schlaefli comes to the board with a strong aerial tour background, mixed with charter, utility and film work. He's worked both at **Papillon** and **Sundance**, developing strong experience with the Las Vegas tour industry and the TOPS program. In addition to his duties with Sundance, he is actively involved in pilot mentoring and career development, serving on the flight training committee with HAI.

Mark looks forward to incorporating what he's learned through ISBAO and HAI to help strengthen TOPS and assure its continued leadership in high standards and accountability for its members. He hopes to lead the organization toward expansions that include providing training, a variety of additional certifications, resources, mentoring, and business development for members, all centered around modern safety culture.

John Becker comes to the board with 33 years of aviation experience, joining **Papillon** after a 20-year career with the U.S. Army. Since joining **Papillon** in 1994, John's work at multiple levels of the company was instrumental in building the company from a 14-aircraft operation in the Grand Canyon to a 54-aircraft, 5-base company serving tour, charter, utility and government sectors throughout the Western United States.

John has served as TOPS's Audit Committee Chair for six years, helping develop and grow the program while also assuring continued increased focus on new safety options and best practices. He will continue as the Audit Chair while bringing increased awareness of the Audit Committee's work to the board level. His goal is to add his expertise to board decisions regarding the audit process, while also helping further develop TOPS beyond the audit program.



*John Becker (left) and Mark Schlaefli joined the TOPS board in February 2016.*



# TOPS Heli-Expo Meeting Overview and Highlights

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## Heli-Expo Meeting Overview

The full minutes of the 2016 General Membership Meeting at Heli-Expo in Louisville are located in the Members section of the new website, [www.topssafety.org](http://www.topssafety.org). Below are highlights to serve as a quick summary.

TOPS Chair Craig Jennison welcomed the five elected board members for the 2016-2018 term: John Becker of **Papillon**, Mark Schlaefli of **Sundance**, Eric Hamp of **Blue Hawaiian**, Brent Nicewonger of **Airbus Helicopters**, and Craig Jennison of **NorthStar Trekking**. Additionally, the membership took some time to celebrate TOPS's 20th anniversary and reflect on the how far TOPS has come and how much it has influenced safety in the helicopter industry.

Regional reports highlighted the state of the helicopter tourism industry around the U.S. Notably, New York now faces requirements to reduce tours by 50% as per a city order by January 2017. Hawaii operators shared customer response to the Pearl Harbor crash of a non-TOPS operator and how TOPS's interview with Hawaii TV helped take the spotlight off individual operators while highlighting the work TOPS operators do to increase safety for passengers.

Additionally, TOPS announced it was actively seeking high quality auditors and welcomed recommendations from the membership. TOPS plans to have additional auditors identified and trained in time for the 2017 audit season.

Additionally, the membership discussed doors off operations and specific verbiage regarding this item. The Directors of Safety Committee were charged with performing a risk assessment on doors off operations and will report back at the next meeting.

Committee reports took up a bulk of the meeting and are highlighted below.

## Committee Updates

### Standardization

The committee submitted language to the board regarding expelling a member. In it they suggested requiring compliance by next meeting. If not met, suspension/removal from membership takes place and the operator must reapply as a new member once in compliance. Additionally, the board was given written guidance on procedures should an auditor be unable to fly at every base, language about board member requirements, new

member mentoring procedures (suggest email and phone are appropriate if physical travel is not). Board will review and present final language at the Fall 2016 meeting.

### Directors of Safety

The committee shared their insights after the Pearl Harbor crash, reporting any crash hurts all operators, but on a whole members were happy with TOPS's response. The committee recommends talking points for accidents, pre-prepared so operators are ready to respond when an accident happens in the industry. The committee is also exploring a stewardship program, highlighting the best practices area of the website, flight risk assessment tools and possible creation of a parenthetical document to show how TOPS works with SMS programs.

### Directors of Maintenance

The committee continues to refine the F.O.D. Control Guidelines and duty time guidelines. Additionally, it is reviewing training options to meet mechanic training requirements for TOPS.

### Marketing

New TOPS brochures, logo, and website are out and doing well. Next steps include working with organizations to promote TOPS to tourism groups such as Expedia. Members were shown how to log into the Members side of the website and access the Download Library, Audit Toolbox, and member directory.

### Audit

All audit documents are located in the Audit Toolbox on the website and are ready for download with the exception of the checklist as Areas of Special Interest are still being finalized.

Members were reminded that the Pre-Audit Checklist must be completed and turned into the auditor prior to the audit, and that it must be turned in with the audit by the auditor.

Three auditors are available this year: Bill Payne, Katherine Hilst and Bruce Mayes. Ron Livingston is no longer eligible for auditing TOPS as he's not attended a meeting in more than a year. TOPS is in the process of reviewing and approving additional auditors for the 2017 audit cycle.

All information on contacting auditors and audit documents can be found in the Audit Toolbox, located in the Members section of the TOPS website ([www.topssafety.org](http://www.topssafety.org)).

## 20th Anniversary Toast

TOPS took a couple of opportunities to celebrate their significant milestone at Heli-Expo. More than 20 years ago a group of helicopter tour operators came together to discuss how they could increase safety in the helicopter tour industry and show the flying public that their safety was a priority. The TOPS program was born and presented to HAI. However, HAI wasn't interested in a program that could remove members for non-compliance. In 1996, TOPS incorporated as its own program and started down a road that would revolutionize helicopter tour safety. At the time, no other program was in place like TOPS in our sector of the industry and SMS hadn't made its debut. Since that time, TOPS has influenced legislation, working with the FAA and NTSB to increase safety, and helped members enjoy safer operations, while also influencing other safety programs.



This was the story told by TOPS co-founder Elling Halvorson at the TOPS meeting and again at a special champagne toast at the TOPS booth at Heli-Expo. A partner in safety for all, growing every year and sharing operator best practices, TOPS remains a leader in helicopter tour safety and toasted both 20 years of success and a future of increased safety. A special thank you to **Vector Aerospace** and **Airbus Helicopters** for sponsoring the toasts.

## Welcome New Members

A big warm welcome to our newest members, **United Rotorcraft** and **JSSI**, both of which joined us the first part of 2016. An additional thank you to JSSI who also attended their first TOPS meeting as a sponsor.



## Audit Season Preparation

As TOPS regular members and auditors prepare for the 2016 audit season, here are a few important reminders and details to help make the process as easy as possible.



All auditor contact information and audit documents are located in the Audit Toolbox on TOPSsafety.org. You'll need to log into the site (bottom option in the Members drop down) to access the Audit Toolbox. All regular members and auditors have received access. Your password can be retrieved on the login screen should it be misplaced.

Remember you must have your auditor chosen by May 1. Audits must be complete and all documents turned in by Sept. 15.

Operators are required to complete a Pre-Audit checklist and submit it to the auditor prior to the auditor's arrival to help streamline the audit process.

As a reminder, the following items must be received by TOPS:

- Audit Agreement signed by auditor and operator prior to the audit.
- Audit Plan from auditor, including expected costs, prior to the audit.
- Plan for flight observations by the auditor, prior to the audit.
- Completed Checklist (signed by both parties), Pre-Audit Checklist, and narrative turned in by the auditor prior to Sept. 15.

The Audit Requirements and Procedures document in the Audit Toolbox clearly outlines requirements and expectations. Please take a moment to review this document and note deadlines and required steps.

## Committee Leadership

Audit Committee, John Becker, john@papillon.com

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

Maintenance, Troy Atkinson, tatkinson@bluehawaiian.com

Standardization, Eric Lincoln, elincoln@bluehawaiian.com

Marketing, Geoff Edlund, geoff@papillon.com