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DPS Awaits Final Determination on Helo-1 Crash

The Alaska Department of Public Safety considers its employees its most valuable asset, and the people it serves its most precious commodity. On March 30, 2013, Alaska suffered a huge loss when an Alaska State Trooper, a state pilot and a citizen were killed in the crash of the department's helicopter, Helo-1, near Talkeetna. The department has always fostered aviation safety, however, in the aftershock of this tragedy, the department has since examined its aviation practices to help ensure that families will never have to go through this again. After the crash, the department has worked with the National Transportation Safety Board to determine a cause, which has yet to be determined.

The department has a dedicated staff of professional aviators and trained aviation specialists who continue to improve on safety programs and confirm they're in line with the best industry practices. The aircraft section, which operates under the Division of Alaska Wildlife Troopers, provides the department with aircraft that are safe and dependable to complete their patrols, search and rescues and other law enforcement assignments in vast distances and a harsh environment. The aircraft section has 43 aircraft and over 50 pilots, both commissioned troopers and civilians, that average a total of about 6,500 flying hours each year. Plus, there are mechanics that maintain aircraft above industry standards. One of the major priorities of the aircraft section is to promote a safety conscious atmosphere.

With its review of aircraft operations, the department is ensuring it is operating with the best practices in the industry and strives to set an example for law enforcement aviation safety. DPS will examine the mission risk assessments and mission briefings before taking flight. Pilots will ensure a set of guidelines, that may include supervisory or management approval, are met before launching.

In addition, the department looked at its standardized aviation training programs. Part of the training restructuring will be developed to further meet the challenges of Alaska State Troopers' unique mission, and the extreme weather and unforgiving environment in Alaska.

Since the crash, the department made some changes to its safety management system to include installing real time satellite tracking devices in its aircraft and creating a new position in the aviation section for a safety officer. This new position will oversee the general safety of daily DPS aviation operations statewide. Additionally, a new commissioned lieutenant was assigned to fill the position of commander overseeing the aircraft section. Both the lieutenant and the aircraft section supervisor have extensive backgrounds in aviation in Alaska. Meanwhile, the department will continue developing safety standards within FAA guidelines and work with Medallion Foundation to enhance aviation safety.

Because the department realizes that aviation safety is an integral part of the service it provides to the citizens of Alaska, we continue to be committed to having a robust safety culture. The department strives to ensure it does not suffer another aviation tragedy. As we carry on this endeavor, our hearts go out to the families as they continue to cope with the loss of their loved ones.

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