
So you think you have a helipad?

by Ben Guttery

Federal Aviation Administration

It's just outside. You've seen it. Even seen a helicopter on it. Yes, there is definitely a helipad here, but is it legal?

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) looks after aviation safety, including licensing of pilots, mechanics and aircraft, and controlling air traffic. However, FAA is also responsible for studying the establishment of airports including hospital heliports. The terms airport, heliport, and helipad are used interchangeably as places to land an aircraft.

Federal Aviation Regulations, specifically Part 157 (14 CFR 157), requires you to notify the FAA at least 90 days before any construction, alteration, activation, deactivation, or change to the status or use of an airport or heliport.

The notice described above must be done by completing FAA Form 7480-1, Notice of Landing Area Proposal. You can find this form on the internet by searching for "FAA Form 7480." The form is one page long with another page of instructions. Also required is a specific USGS topographic map marked with the heliports location.

During the notice process, FAA conducts an aeronautical study to look at the impact of nearby objects. We also send an inspector out to look at the site to ensure a helicopter can safely arrive and depart from the landing site. Once the heliport is studied by FAA, we



photo by Alan Baker

send a letter indicating any issues with the site. If the site is already in use or about to open, we send the owner an Airport Master Record (FAA Form 5010) to complete. This is our official source of data on ownership and use of the heliport. Most importantly, this is the step that allows us to request a location identifier for your heliport. A location identifier is a code for the airport just like the ones on your luggage tags (AUS, DFW, SAT, IAH, HOU). Having a location identifier will assist the helicopter operators in filing FAA flight plans to your hospital. It also puts the facility in our official database that goes into onboard navigation equipment to aid in navigation to your facility. This service is free.

There are many hospitals out there that have not had FAA look at their helipads, even though there is a regulation that requires this. However, FAA's interest is more in safety than in enforcing this regulation. For your protection, you want to have a letter from the FAA saying your heliport is safe and all the proper paperwork in place.

There are a couple ways to confirm your helipad exists, officially. Both are on the internet.

First, try www.airnav.com and click on AIRPORTS and enter the name of your heliport, town, or city. You may need to go to the advanced search feature. Another system is operated by FAA's 5010 support consultant and is at www.gcr1.com/5010web. Again, enter the city and state to return all the registered sites. This latter system lists all of the official landing site information. If you find your record has some errors, print the form, handwrite corrections, sign it and send it to us. We will get the data updated.

What if you aren't on one of those lists? Don't panic. Just call our office to see if your helipad has ever been studied. Frequently, the first part of the process is completed, but the actual registration filing has been forgotten. No registration equals no helipad.

Using registered helipads has been a focus area of FAA's recent efforts on helicopter EMS (HEMS) activities. Our inspectors who work with the air ambulance operators have been reviewing the lists of hospitals they regularly serve to ensure they have been approved by FAA. We've found a lot that have never been studied. Many have been in existence so long everyone just thought they were registered.

Regardless of where you are, we can help you get it resolved. If you have any questions, please contact Ben Guttery, senior program manager, Texas Airports Development Office, FAA, Fort Worth, Texas; phone 817-222-5614; fax 817-222-5989; email ben.guttery@faa.gov.