

Special Notice to PHPA members from the PHPA Board of Directors



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As many of you may have recently heard, the F.B.I. and the DHS have issued joint alerts on the East Coast to helicopter tour operators regarding the potential threat of Al-Qaeda using helicopters for terrorist operations.

To underscore the seriousness of this concern a member of the Los Angeles F.B.I. joined us at our routine Board of Directors meeting last night to brief the PHPA Board on this developing issue. The intention was that we would work to alert and share this information with our members who are located through out the United States.

Highlights and key items from the information provided by F.B.I. Special Agent Peter Hoffmann follow:

“ ... Al-Qaeda (AQ) remains committed to using aircraft for future attacks within the US. AQ operatives are known to have considered conducting an attack against U.S. interests using a helicopter packed with explosives. Although there is no credible specific evidence supporting the use of helicopter aerial attacks within the United State, the threat cannot be discounted ...”

“... Terrorists may view helicopters as an attractive weapon due to their maneuverability and non-threatening appearance when they fly at low altitudes in urban environments ...”

“ ... possible scenarios include AQ operatives seeking out vulnerabilities in security procedures to hijack commercial helicopter flights...”

“... Operatives may also contract a flight from a charter or tour service to facilitate a high-jacking wherein the helicopter could be used in a suicide attack of high profile ground targets or to attack the public in open areas, including parades and sporting events, with explosives carried on board to increase the destructive effects ... “

“ ... law enforcement agencies should also maintain liaison with commercial and private helicopter operators and encourage them to report suspicious incidents and inquiries ...”

“ ... Helicopter flight school operators should also be alert to and report suspicious inquiries; such as undue interest in helicopter operations, payloads and security procedures. ...”

SA Hoffmann indicated this focus of concern stems from aircraft-specific information which was found on a computer recently recovered from a terrorist operative.

The FBI suggests that private sector owners and operators as well as pilots and maintenance crews should undertake the following protective measures:

Personnel / Passenger Security Procedures

- Enforce thorough screening of passengers and require identification of all passengers, especially escorted tours, prior to boarding charter flights and tours.
- Verify that baggage and cargo are known to the person on board.
[additionally, the PHPA Board recommends that carry-on baggage for tour flights should be minimized and, with the guest's consent, searched prior to boarding the aircraft]
- Establish and enforce employee identification measures for aircraft maintenance, refueling, service, delivery personnel and others who may have contact with aircraft or passengers.
- Report loitering in the vicinity of aircraft or air operations.
- Report suspicious inquiries into aircraft and aircraft operations, and suspicious incidents involving individuals taking photographs, video or notes of aircraft.
- Report immediately any personnel impersonating pilots, security personnel, emergency medical technicians, or other personnel using uniforms or vehicles as methods to gain access to aviation facilities or aircraft.

Physical Security Procedures

- Enforce current physical security standards at airports and heliports. Fix broken or defective doors, gates and locks that secure access to parked helicopters and refueling and maintenance areas.
- Establish physical barriers in passenger boarding areas to restrict un- authorized persons from accessing helicopters or areas of aircraft operations.
- Install magnetometers in passenger boarding areas to discourage passengers from carrying weapons or dangerous items on board charter or tour helicopters.

Points of Contact for Follow up

FBI Los Angeles 24 / 7	(310) 477 - 6565
FBI SA Peter Hoffmann	(310) 477 - 6565
LAPD Threat Hotline	(877) 284 - 7328

FBI Website	www.FBI.gov
PHPA Website	www.PHPA.org

The PHPA Board of Directors on behalf of our members sincerely thank F.B.I. Assistant Director in Charge of the Los Angeles Field Office, Richard Garcia as well as Special Agent Hoffmann for attending our Board meeting and bringing this important information to the attention of the PHPA membership.

James Paules

PHPA Board of Directors.

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