AIRBUS HELICOPTERS

No. 3983-S-22

SAFETY INFORMATION NOTICE

SUBJECT: AUTO FLIGHT - AFCS (Automatic Flight Control System)

Use of AFCS to mitigate the risk of operation in brownout / whiteout conditions

For the attention of

AIRCRAFT CONCERNED	Version(s)	
	Civil	Military
AS365	N3	
AS565		MBe
EC155	B, B1	
EC225	LP	
EC725		AP
AS332	C, C1, L, L2	B, B1, F1, M, M1
AS532		A2, AC, AL, SC, UE, UL
EC175	B	
H160	B	
MBB-BK117	D-2, D-2m, D-3, D-3m	D-2m, D-3m
EC135	T3H, P3H, EC635 T3H, EC635 P3H	

Reason

With this Safety Information Notice, Airbus Helicopter would like to remind that helicopters equipped with AFCS upper modes can help to perform safe approach and landing.

Background

Airbus Helicopters was recently informed of several accidents where – without the use of the AFCS upper modes - the approach to an unprepared terrain was performed manually. In one of these cases, when the helicopter was close to the ground, the main rotor downwash lifted dust causing the pilot to lose visual references with the ground (brownout). The pilot was unable to maintain a level attitude causing the structure and main rotor blades to impact the ground. Fortunately, the crew and occupants were not injured in this event. However, other cases of brownout or whiteout have ended with more serious consequences.

Brownout or whiteout (when snow instead of dust is involved) can be extremely disorienting. Visual contact with the ground is lost and the swirling dust or snow particles can rapidly induce spatial disorientation and loss of situational awareness. At night, the risks are even higher.

Airbus Helicopters would like to emphasize the need to properly assess the landing site, prior to landing, for the potential risk of brownout or whiteout. In case of an unexpected capture in brownout or whiteout, the autopilot should be used to stabilize the aircraft.

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Airbus Helicopters would like to remind pilots that the best use of upper modes is described in the applicable Flight Operation Briefing Notes (FOBN, available in TIPI) or in the Flight Crew Operating Manual (FCOM). These documents also describe how automation (especially the automatic hover modes) can be used in case of unexpected loss of visual cues near the ground as in brownout or whiteout.

In order to become familiar with the use of the different AFCS upper modes, and facilitate their use in case of a sudden reduction in visibility, Airbus Helicopters recommends regular practicing of the use of these modes during training or standard missions.