

Laser-Strike Protection Sought

More than 12,000 aircraft laser strikes were reported in the United States between 1980 and 2011, with 88 percent involving airplanes, according to a report by the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration's Civil Aerospace Medical Institute (CAMI).

About 18 percent of the laser strikes (also called illuminations) involving airplanes occurred in the so-called Laser-Free Zone of 2,000 ft or below, while 70 percent of helicopter strikes occurred in that zone, the CAMI report said.

Helicopter crewmembers were more likely than their counterparts in airplanes to report adverse effects stemming from laser strikes within the Laser-Free Zone, the report said. This may be, in part, because the large bubble canopies on helicopters can allow more light to enter and reflect throughout the cockpit, the report said.

The report's authors said that because of their findings, as well as the nature of helicopter operations, "special protective and preventative measures may be needed for helicopters and other low-flying aircraft outside of designated airport flight hazard zones due to the higher percentage of illuminations reported and the increased rate of adverse effects associated with these events."

Their recommendations also suggested that authorities consider equipping helicopters, especially those operated by law enforcement personnel, with laser-detection and laser-tracking equipment "to improve the possibility of apprehending perpetrators of these offenses."

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