

SAFETY ALERT



Safety Alert No. – 316
12 June 2015

Contact: Steve Rauch
Phone: 571-594-8383

Aviation Near Miss

Overview: BSEE recently experienced an aviation near miss that narrowly escaped becoming a head-on collision. The BSEE helicopter was transporting two BSEE inspectors to an offshore platform and had just left an airport's Class D Airspace when they encountered another helicopter flying inbound to that airport. The two helicopters were flying directly towards each other at the same altitude and came within an estimated 200 feet (laterally) before either pilot saw the other. When the pilot of the inbound helicopter saw the BSEE helicopter he banked to the left and continued on to the airport, contacting the tower and reporting the near miss. Neither aircraft was damaged, and there were no injuries.

Several issues contributed to the near miss. First, weather conditions were foggy with ceilings as low as 500 feet and visibility of 5 miles. These conditions, while not optimal, exceed the minimum weather required by the contract. Second, the Traffic Collision Avoidance System (TCAS) in the BSEE aircraft did not automatically switch from "standby mode" to "operational mode" upon takeoff, and the passengers could not hear the TCAS audio alerts. And, lastly, neither pilot was using their forward-facing pulse light at the time of the incident.

Findings:

- There were no violations of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) rules or contract requirements by either pilot. However;
 - Neither pilot was using their landing light in the pulse mode.
 - Both pilots are responsible to "See and Avoid" but neither pilot is considered "at fault".
- The TCAS did not automatically switch from standby to operational.
- The near miss was reported to the airport Tower and no follow up information was requested.
- The "near-miss" was reported in accordance with BSEE safety tracking system policy. However, notification to BSEE senior leadership was delayed.

Recommendations:

- Require the use of the Strobe Light and the Pulse Light at all times during flight unless their use interferes with the pilot.
- Ensure the TCAS is in the operational mode for all flight operations.
 - The TCAS audio function should also be operational at all intercom stations.
- Conduct periodic tests of aviation mishap response plans including notification requirements for both the aviation service provider and the organization whose personnel are being transported. Ensure expectations for early incident notification are communicated throughout the organization.

A Safety Alert is a tool used by BSEE to inform the offshore oil and gas industry of the circumstances surrounding an accident or a near miss. It also contains recommendations that should help prevent the recurrence of such an incident on the Outer Continental Shelf.

