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SAFETYWIRE



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AINsight: Why Small Aviation Teams Need Big Support - Training programs need to take the needs of small flight departments into account

(Source: Sheryl Barden, AIN Contributor, AINsight, June 18, 2025)



If you lead a small flight department, I see you. You're working long hours, wearing too many hats, and holding the operation together with sheer grit. Maybe your team is just two or three people. Maybe you're also the scheduler, the safety officer, and the HR department. You do it because you care and because you're proud of the work. But I also know it can come at a cost.

The Reality Behind the Flight

From the outside, it might look like you have downtime between trips. But we both know that "downtime" usually means being on call. You're either waiting for a mission or watching your calendar fill and refill. That pressure adds up.

It's especially hard when you, your copilot, or a family member has a medical emergency. Larger departments can absorb the hit. Yours can't. A single head cold can derail the whole week.

That's why work-life balance isn't just a nice-to-have—it's essential. Crews need protected time off, which includes both vacation and sick leave. We have to respect it, not just offer it.

One solution I've seen work well is building a list of contract pilots. Charter pilots, in particular, can be great partners. Many know their open dates in advance and can commit to covering a trip.

Owners Need To Understand the Demands

Often, the responsibility falls on you—the pilot in charge—to educate your aircraft owner or company leadership. That's not easy, but it's necessary.

Many owners assume that if the jet hasn't flown, the crew's been off. But we know better. You're on standby, managing logistics, handling maintenance, prepping trips, ordering catering, and tracking budgets. And, if you're lucky, getting a few minutes to breathe.

There's an old saying I hear often in small departments: "You don't pay me to fly. You pay me to be available." It still rings true. We need owners and execs to see the full picture. A rested, prepared crew doesn't happen by accident. It requires resources—and respect.

Professional Development Isn't Optional

Here's the other challenge: development. You want to grow your skills, and hopefully your team. You want to attend events like NBAA-BACE, take training courses, or work toward leadership roles. But how do you justify time away when no one's left to fly the airplane?

We have to make space for growth. In many departments, the SIC could be one promotion away from running the show. That kind of responsibility demands preparation. And without it, the costs of a misstep can far exceed the price of proper training.

Make professional training a dedicated line item in your budget. If your company won't fund it, look into scholarships. And look for training in more flexible formats, including virtual courses, on-demand content, and bite-sized learning.

How the Industry Can Step Up

According to NBAA, more than 80% of member flight departments are small. That's the majority of our industry. Yet most training programs still cater to the few—those with larger teams and deeper pockets.

Gone are the days when you could rotate crews through weeklong courses. Today's flight departments need flexible, cost-effective options.

That's where we, as an industry, must do better.

We would all benefit from more virtual learning that individuals can access on their own time—on a trip or at home.

We also could use more leadership roundtables, more mentorship circles, and more recognition for departments that are getting it right. And these can be virtual. I challenge you to start one!

Recruiters and consultants have a role to play, too. When advising owners, we must challenge the idea that “less is more.” After all, thin staffing compromises safety, drains morale, and drives turnover. Let’s build a system that actually supports the majority.

From Survival to Sustainability

Small flight departments are the backbone of business aviation. You support high-level executives. You fly complex missions. You uphold the highest standards with the fewest people.

But you shouldn’t have to burn out to succeed.

Let’s build a future where your team has the tools to thrive. That means education, support, training, and time.

It’s not just about keeping the airplane in the air. It’s about keeping your team strong, healthy, and ready for whatever comes next..



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sheryl Barden

AIN Contributor

✉ Contact

Sheryl Barden, CAM, is the CEO of Aviation Personnel International, the longest-running recruiting and HR consulting firm exclusively serving business aviation. A thought leader on all things related to business aviation professionals, Barden is an NBAA CAM Fellow and formerly served on NBAA’s board of directors and its advisory council.

Risk management starts with knowing yourself

(Source: Ryan Vandehei, Vertical Magazine, June 16, 2025)



Risk management lessons often come in unexpected ways — sometimes through simple moments that reveal just how much we still have to learn.

Picture a student pilot preparing for their first solo cross-country flight. They've calmed their nerves, reviewed emergency procedures again that morning, and double-checked the airspace along their route. They even stuck to a bland breakfast to keep their stomach settled.

Student pilots try to think of everything.

Arriving at the airfield early, the student moves through their preflight and startup checklist smoothly. So far, it's shaping up to be an ordinary day.

After takeoff, they receive a tower handoff to air traffic control (ATC) for flight following — just as their instructor had practiced with them for weeks. But near the destination airport, the student is handed off to a new controller. Again, nothing unexpected. They had even chair-flew this part with their instructor the day before.

"N2781, please contact Jackson Center on 122.3."

"N2781 switching 122.3." // "Jackson Center, N2781 Solo with you."

"Roger, N2781 Solo, IDENT."

It's in that moment the student realizes — they don't know what "IDENT" means.

Somehow, both they and their instructor had missed it. It happens. In the chaos of learning, things can fall through the cracks — even the seemingly simple ones.

"Uh ... Jackson Center, N2781 Solo."

"N2781 Solo, affirmative — IDENT."

"Uh ... this is Ryan?"

(The student didn't actually say that last part — but they thought about it.)

Thankfully, Center was able to identify the aircraft, and the situation turned out to be a harmless, laughable moment. Their instructor later explained IDENT, and it became just another story from flight school.

But the takeaway is deeper than a funny misstep.

First, we don't always know where our gaps are. Sometimes, in hindsight, we're stunned by how we could have missed something so basic — especially when that small miss suddenly becomes something much bigger. On the ground, we're excellent planners and risk mitigators. But in the air, we're tested constantly. We make backup plans for our backup plans. Still, even the best preparation can unravel with one unexpected oversight. Real risk management is not just in the planning, but in how we react — with composure and clarity.

Second, risk management is an ongoing process. It was once described to me as walking into a cave. We step in, see a boulder, and climb over it. Walk farther, face another obstacle, work our way around. Then another, and another. Eventually, we turn around and realize — we've gone so deep, we can't see the entrance anymore.

Pilots are particularly good at getting past obstacles. We adapt. We solve problems. But sometimes, we move so far forward, focused only on the next hurdle, that we lose track of where we are.

So, keep preparing. Stay aware of your own limits. Emotional intelligence — knowing how you personally react under pressure — can be more valuable than trying to memorize every scenario. Because, inevitably, you'll miss something. The key is knowing how you'll respond when that moment comes.

Ryan Vandehei is a former U.S. Coast Guard search-and-rescue pilot and an MFA candidate in Creative Writing at Ashland University. A published poet and mental health advocate, he writes from his experience with PTSD to shed light on trauma and healing. He has keynoted multiple events and created the Coast Guard's aviation podcast "Flight Suit Friday."

USHST – Monthly Safety Report



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United States
Helicopter Safety Team



Monthly Safety Report June 2025

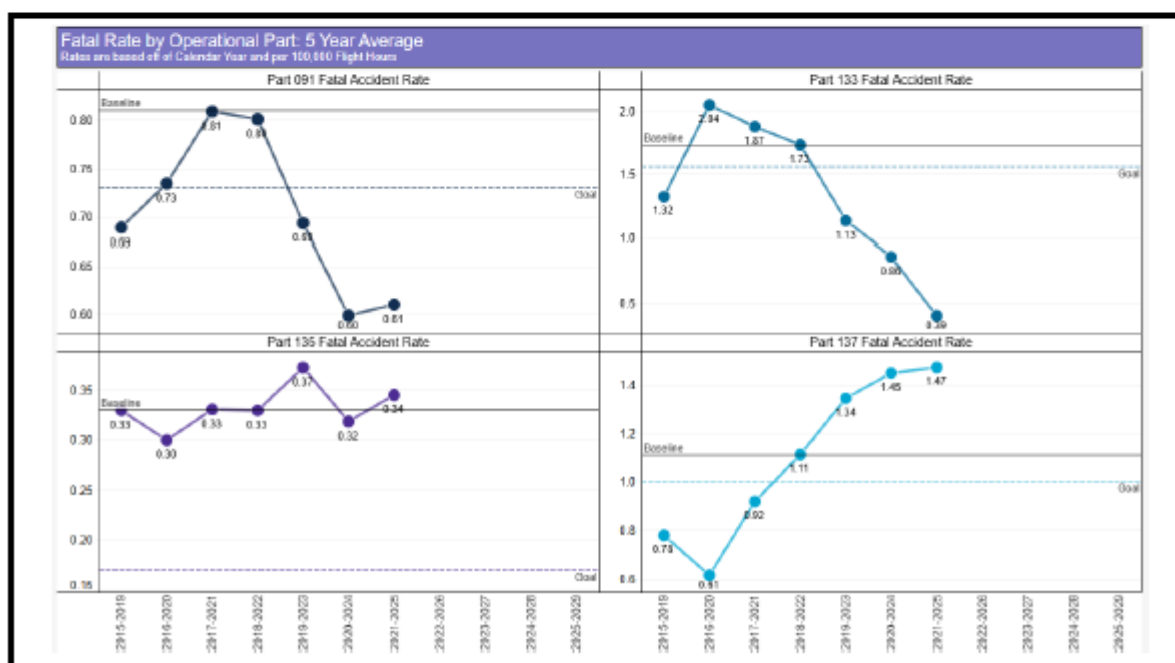
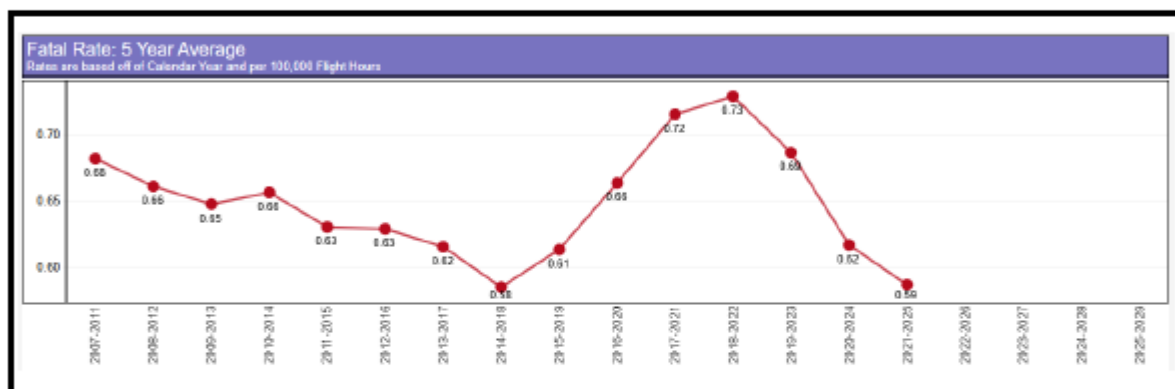
The USHST is a regional partner to the Vertical Aviation Safety Team (VAST).

USHST MISSION:

To develop, deliver, and promote valuable safety resources focused on improving the US helicopter community's safety culture and performance.

USHST Vision:

A civil registered helicopter community without fatal accidents





Did "YOU" Know?

In the US there are 12,000 + helicopters, 32,000 + helicopter pilots and over 292,000 aircraft mechanics!

The USHST has identified the following industries for OUTREACH:

Personal/Private, Helicopter Air Ambulance (HAA), Commercial and Aerial Application

Your participation in joining our vision of fatal accidents is important to us. To determine how your interests best align with active USHST efforts, please click the link below to complete the form and submit.

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(3308 Members, 10 New)



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Helicopter Safety OUTREACH events:

- [VAI Flight Report \(May 2025\) - Protecting Our Industry](#)
- [USHST Spring 2025 Newsletter](#)
- [VAI Webinar: UAS, BVLOS, & the Next Chapter of Vertical Aviation - 26 June, 2pm EST](#)
- [Peer Pilot Program](#)



Helicopter - Safety Enhancement (H-SE) Details

H-SE 23-01: Professional Preflight Planning & Go/No-Go Aeronautical Decision Making (P3-GADM)

The primary objective of this safety enhancement is to help prevent fatal helicopter accidents that can be directly or indirectly linked to preflight judgment errors, decision-making errors, and inadequate mission planning. The H-SE team led by the HAI Safety Working Group will develop and deliver sources that will likely include policies, procedures, practices, tools, and other resources/tools that when implemented correctly, can prevent future fatal rotorcraft accidents attributable to flawed, inappropriate, and unauthorized preflight GO/NO-GO decisions. To frame the objective in a more positive manner, the team seeks to make it easier for flight planners to make well-informed GO/NO-GO decisions that are correct, appropriate, authorized before every flight, and independent from potential internal or external pressures, influences, or other factors.

USHST PRIORITY Safety Resources:

[Videos](#)

[USHST Safety App](#)

[Original H-SE Summation Report](#)

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March 9-12, 2026 | Atlanta
Exhibits Open March 10-12

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SAFETY MANAGER'S CORNER

PRISM SMS: Workflow Manager Assignments Added to My Safety Center



When a user logs into PRISM SMS, they will land on My Safety Center (MSC). Depending on your Group Permissions, you may see two or three tiles on My Safety Center. The first tile is an image. Your account admin can upload a picture of your aircraft or your company logo or add any other image. This image is universal for all users in the account so whatever gets added will appear on My Safety Center for all users within the account.

If you have access to the Flight Risk Analysis Tool (FRAT), you will see a second tile called FRAT Comments & Alerts. Just like with the image, this tile will be the same for all users within that account. Anyone with access to the FRAT can add an airport comment or mission area comment. If you are a listed crewmember on a FRAT report, you will get an email notification when the report is Saved as Final. The subject line of the email will say: "Please Submit Your Comments and Alerts for your flight from XXX to XXX on Date". This email will include a link for you to use to submit comments. You can also add comments by going to the Flight Risk Analysis Tool in PRISM SMS and clicking on Comments and Alerts.

The third tile is unique to each user; this is the My Assignments tile. In the past, the My Assignments tile would list any workflow step assignments for the user who's logged in as well as any IEP Checklist assignments. PRISM has enhanced this by adding Workflow Manager assignments. Now, in addition to the workflow step assignments, Workflow Managers can easily access the assignments where they are listed as the Workflow Manager. Each assignment includes a link that will take the user directly to the assignment in either a safety report in the Reporting Program Tool (RPT), a risk assessment in the Risk Assessment Tool (RAT), or an IEP Checklist in the Internal Evaluation Program (IEP) tool.

Connected Online: ● ✉ ⚙ Allen AccountSafety 👤

Click here to Create a hazard / incident report

My Safety Center

PRISM SMS

FRAT Comments & Alerts (7)

Read 0 Unread 7

1. Central florida tower - test
2. CENTENNIAL (KAPA) - Snow piles everywhere
3. Flatirons - Watch out for nasty turbulence coming out of the big "V" cut.
4. LZ Bravo - This is a temporary zone with loose rocks and a slope downward to the West that is visually deceptive
5. CENTENNIAL (KAPA) - One of the best FBOs I've ever been to
6. ROCKY MOUNTAIN METRO (KBJC) - Lots of construction on the ramp and the signage is not very clear
7. ASPEN-PITKIN CO/SARDY FLD (KASE) - Heavy firefighting aircraft presence and they get priority for fuel truck

My Assignments

Source: 3 Selected

Source	Type of assignment	Details	Date ↓
BPT	Workflow step assignment	White conduct...	07/01/2025
IEP	Checklist submission	Posted Dec 2022	06/20/2025
IEP	Checklist assignment	Posted JUN 2025	06/20/2025
IEP	Workflow Manager Assignment	Operations 4 - ...	06/10/2025
RAT	Workflow Manager Assignment	New model of al...	06/10/2025
IEP	Checklist assignment	Posted Oct 2023	06/17/2025
IEP	Checklist assignment	Posted NOV 2024	05/16/2025

Quote of the Month

You have got to have something in which to believe. You have got to have leaders, organization, friendships, and contacts that help you to believe that, and help you to put out your best.



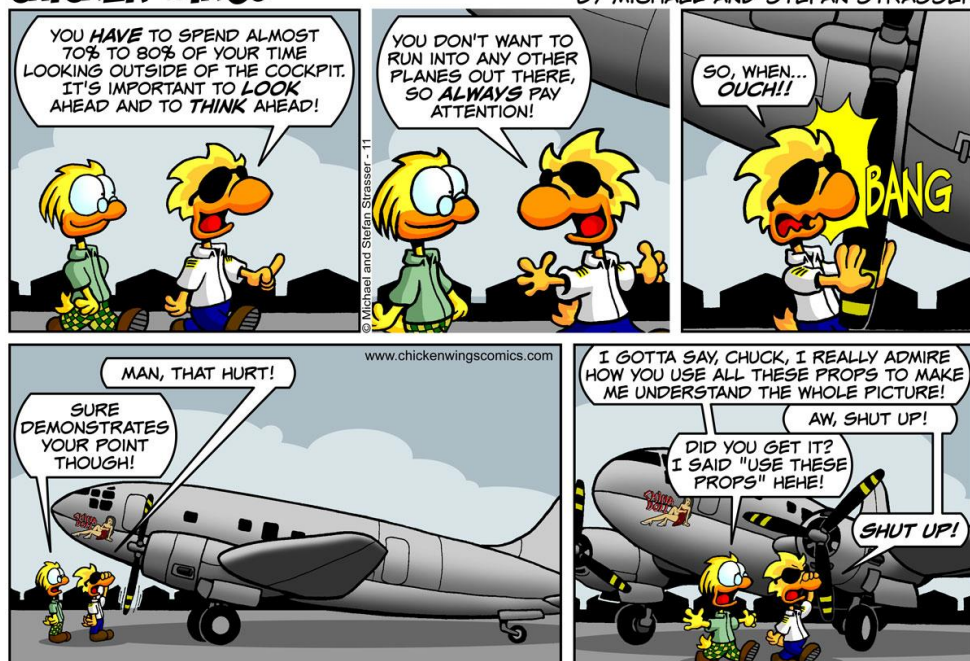
BY: Dwight D. Eisenhower

No man is an island. That well known axiom points towards exactly what Ike stated. Collaboration, coordination and communication are the three most important words related to operating in the 21st century; let's refer to them as the three Cs. Today's big data information age provides exposure to practically everything, so the keys to success reside in useful action grounded in awareness and knowledge. Who steers all of this information, data and the three Cs? The answer is surprisingly simple, yet sublimely complex. You are the answer. In various situations, you must lead, organize, collaborate, coordinate and communicate. Sure, that sounds surprisingly simple but don't be fooled; it really is sublimely complex. Knowing what to say and when to say it cannot be taken for granted. We have all observed the results when someone "opens mouth before engaging brain" and its effects often don't appear immediately but rest assured, they do impact. Make it your goal to understand how to lead and interact in today's big data information world and the best results will follow.

On Short Final...

CHICKEN WINGS®

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UPCOMING COURSES

July 15-16, 2025—PROS Course

Risk-Based IOSA Training

Virtual

July 21-25, 2025—PROS Course

ALAT Training

Denver, CO

July 28-30, 2025—PROS Course

ICAT Training

Virtual

Aug 12-14, 2025—PROS Course

Airline Safety

Management

System (SMS)

Virtual

Sept 16-17, 2025—PROS Course

Risk-Based IOSA Training

Virtual

Sept 16-18, 2025—PRISM Course

Safety Management System

(SMS) Training

Denver, CO

Sept 29-Oct 3, 2025—PROS Course

ALAT Training

Denver, CO

Go to [Upcoming Training Classes](#) to register.

