

# *Aerospace Medical Association*



*President*  
**CDR Andrew Bellenkes, Ph.D.**  
HQ USAFA/DFBL  
2354 Fairchild Drive  
USAF Academy, CO 80840-4159

320 South Henry Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314-3579  
Phone: 703-739-2240  
Fax: 703-739-9652  
[www.asma.org](http://www.asma.org)

*Executive Director*  
**Russell B. Rayman, M.D., M.P.H.**  
Association Home Office

February 17, 2009

Ms. Lorenda Ward  
Hearing Officer  
National Transportation Safety Board  
490 L'Enfant Plaza East, SW  
Washington, DC 20594

Dear Ms. Ward:

I am writing to you as Executive Director of the Aerospace Medical Association (AsMA), an organization representing approximately 3,000 aerospace medicine physicians, flight nurses, and scientists engaged in related research.

The AsMA shares the National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) concern at the frequency of medevac helicopter mishaps. The NTSB special investigation report of January 2006 identified inadequate flight preparation and adverse/deteriorating flight conditions as commonly cited factors in accidents. Although there is legitimate focus on the operational issues, we suggest that attention should also be given to medical considerations. It is the needs of the patient that differentiate emergency medical service operations from other helicopter operations and it seems likely that operators may sometimes allow the perceived urgency of the medical situation to override flight safety considerations.

The AsMA, therefore, recommends that the Board consider the potential benefits of additional research to evaluate the contribution of the medical (patient) factors to operational decision-making. We are also aware of published medical guidelines for air evacuation (Thomson DP, Thomas SH. Guidelines for air medical dispatch. Prehospital Emergency Care; 2003:265-71). AsMA further recommends that such guidelines be standardized and be distributed as widely as possible to units conducting helicopter medevac operations.

We believe these endeavors would help physicians in assessing the potential benefit to the patient of air versus ground transportation, the suitability for transport by air, and the urgency of air evacuation. This could, in turn, assist the operators in developing flight safety management systems to more appropriately balance the needs of the patient and flight safety.

We hope you find merit in these recommendations. AsMA stands ready to assist you in such an endeavor.

Sincerely,

  
Russell B. Rayman, M.D.  
Executive Director

**AEROSPACE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**  
**THE INTERNATIONAL LEADER FOR EXCELLENCE IN AEROSPACE MEDICINE**  
**80th ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC MEETING, WESTIN BONAVENTURE,**  
**LOS ANGELES, CA, MAY 3 - 7, 2009**