



# VERTICALLY SPEAKING: FAA Rotorcraft Safety Continuum on Track

By Gene Trainor, FAA

This article was supplied by the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and edited to conform to the Vertiflite style guide. To learn more about the safety continuum and the history of our advocacy for single engine IFR, go to [www.vtol.org/se-ifr](http://www.vtol.org/se-ifr).

**W**ebinars and presentations that explain and clarify the recently issued FAA Rotorcraft Safety Continuum for Systems and Equipment Policy — designed to make helicopters safer — will be coming to an event or a computer near you.

The FAA Rotorcraft Standards Branch, Helicopter Association International (HAI), AHS International, Aircraft Electronics Association (AEA) and General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA) plan to coordinate these presentations to answer questions about the policy and remove any misconceptions.

In June 2017, the FAA published its policy statement—for Part 27 normal category rotorcraft systems and equipment—whose purpose “is to facilitate a more rapid incorporation of advances in technology for systems and equipment by recognizing a balanced approach between the risk and safety benefits for installing such technology.” The hope is that more flexible certification policies will make safety technology more accessible, easier and less expensive to install so more lives will be saved. This safety technology includes autopilots and primary flight displays, which typically include attitude, altitude and airspeed indicators.

Currently, FAA rotorcraft certification regulations (Parts 27 and 29) divide helicopters into two aircraft types: normal category (up to nine passengers and 7,000 lb [3.2 t]) and transport category (greater than 7,000 lb and up to 20,000 lb [9 t]), with some additional requirements for helicopters over 20,000 lb).

The policy, which applies to helicopters under Part 27, will be divided into four classes. These further divisions were necessary to eliminate the one-size-fits-all approach that can discourage installation of the equipment. We realize that holding smaller basic helicopters to the same standards of larger and more complex helicopters could impede safety by making safety equipment too expensive to install on smaller helicopters.

The classes are divided as follows: Class I covers helicopters with reciprocating engines and five or fewer occupants including the crew; Class II covers helicopters with single turbine engines, space for five or fewer occupants including the crew, and a maximum gross weight of up to 4,000 lb [1.8 t]; Class III covers helicopters with single turbine engines, six or more occupants including the



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crew, and a maximum gross weight of over 4,000 lb up to 7,000 lb; Class IV covers helicopters with twin turbine engines.

Each class has a set of standards and level of scrutiny, with Class IV having the highest level of scrutiny because these helicopters are the larger and most sophisticated aircraft. Class I has the least scrutiny.

Based on comments received when the policy was issued for public comments, some members of the helicopter community were expecting that the policy would address specific equipment installations, especially for single-engine instrument flight rules (IFR) helicopter approvals.

“This policy was not meant to address specific equipment regulations,” said Jorge Castillo, Rotorcraft Standards Branch regulations and policy group manager. “Instead the policy was issued to spell out broad expectations to allow flexibility in the installation of systems and equipment for all Part 27 approvals, not just IFR.”

To spread the word, Andy Shaw, Rotorcraft Standards Branch engineer and the FAA contact person for the policy, briefed the policy at the December 2017 European Aviation Safety Agency Rotorcraft Symposium in Cologne, Germany. The FAA plans to discuss the policy during the February-March 2018 HAI Heli-Expo helicopter convention. An FAA-industry webinar [hosted by AHS and HAI] took place a few months ago, and others are planned.

#### About the Author

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