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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ALEA Selected to Participate in the FAA's ARAC ROPWG

Dan Schwarzbach, ALEA CEO/Executive Director, will represent ALEA and public safety aviation as a member of The FAA's Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Committee (ARAC) Rotorcraft Occupant Protection Working Group (ROPWG). The initial meeting takes place this week at the FAA's offices in Fort Worth, TX.

On November 5, 2015, the ARAC was tasked to provide recommendations regarding occupant protection rulemaking in normal and transport category rotorcraft for older certification basis type designs that are still in production. The FAA amended regulations to incorporate occupant protection rules, including those for emergency landing conditions and fuel system crash resistance, for new type designs in the 1980s and 1990s. These rule changes do not apply to newly manufactured rotorcraft with older type designs or to derivative type designs that keep the certification basis of the original type design. This approach has resulted in a very low incorporation rate of occupant protection features into the rotorcraft fleet, and fatal accidents remain unacceptably high. At the end of 2014, only 16% of U.S. fleet had complied with the crash resistant fuel system requirements effective 20 years earlier, and only 10% had energy-absorbing seats. A recent fatal accident study has shown these measures would have been effective in saving lives.

One of the FAA's main focuses is on helicopter safety. The total number of U.S. helicopter accidents has steadily declined over the past 10 years, but the aviation community has not made sustainable progress in reducing the number of fatal accidents. In response to the FAA's 2013-2014 post-crash fire and blunt force trauma study, along with concerns raised by the NTSB, the FAA has tasked the Rotorcraft Occupant Protection Working Group to take a new look at the airworthiness standards for older helicopter type designs. This work will focus on solutions that give helicopter occupants the greatest possible chance of surviving an emergency landing or accident. The ROPWG will provide the FAA with three reports over the next six to twenty-four months.

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