



# *HELICOPTER FACTS*

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## **Twelve Operational Pitfalls for Helicopter Pilots**

Pilots, particularly those with considerable experience, try to complete a flight as planned, please passengers, meet schedules and generally demonstrate the "right stuff." This basic drive can have an adverse effect on safety and can impose an unrealistic assessment of piloting skills under stressful situations. Even worse, repetitive patterns of behavior based on unrealistic assessments can produce piloting practices that are dangerous, often illegal, and will ultimately lead to mishaps. Here are 12 of these possibly dangerous tendencies or behavior patterns:

**Responding to Peer Pressure** – This is poor decision-making based upon emotional responses to peers rather than evaluating a situation objectively.

**Mental Expectancy** - The inability to recognize and cope with changes in a situation different from those anticipated or planned. Visual illusions and similar aural sounds occurring at the "wrong" time often lead to such miscues.

**Get-There-Itis** - This "disease", common among pilots, clouds the vision and impairs judgment by causing a fixation on the original goal or destination combined with a total disregard for any alternative courses of action.

**Duck-Under Syndrome** - The tendency to "sneak a peek" by descending below minimums during an approach. Based on a belief that there is always a built in "fudge" factor that can be used or on an unwillingness to admit defeat and shoot a missed approach.

**Scud Running** - Pushing the capabilities of the pilot and the aircraft to the limits by trying to maintain visual contact with the terrain while trying to avoid physical contact with it.

**Continuing Visual Flight Rules into Instrument Conditions** - The all-too-often result of the above mentioned practice of scud running when this becomes the only alternative to flying into the ground. It is even more dangerous if the pilot is not instrument qualified or is unwilling to believe what the gauges are indicating.

**Getting Behind the Aircraft** -- Allowing events or the situation to control your actions rather than the other way around. This is characterized by a constant state of surprise at what happens next.

**Loss of Positional/Situational Awareness** - Another case of “getting behind the aircraft” which results in not knowing where you are, and an inability to recognize deteriorating circumstances and/or the misjudgment of the rate of deterioration.

**Operating Without Adequate Fuel Reserves** - Ignoring minimum fuel reserve requirements under either Visual Flight Rules or Instrument Flight Rules. This is generally the result of overconfidence, a lack of flight planning, or deliberately ignoring the regulations.

**Descent Below the Minimum En Route Altitude** - The duck-under syndrome (mentioned earlier) manifesting itself during the en route portion of an Instrument Flight Rules operation.

**Flying Outside the Envelope** - Unjustified reliance on the (usually mistaken) belief that the aircraft’s high performance capabilities meet the demands imposed by the pilot's (usually overestimated) high performance flying skills.

**Neglect of Flight Planning, Preflight Inspections, Checklists, Etc.** - Unjustified reliance on the pilot's (usually overestimated) short- and long-term memory of regular flying skills, of repetitive and familiar routes, etc.

All experienced pilots have fallen prey to, or have been tempted by, one or more of these 12 dangerous tendencies at some time in their flying careers. Hopefully, they are natural mistakes that can be easily recognized for what they are and quickly avoided.

The International Helicopter Safety Team (IHST) promotes safety and works to reduce accidents. The organization was formed in 2005 to lead a government and industry cooperative effort to address factors that were affecting an unacceptable helicopter accident rate.

More information about the IHST, its reports, its safety tools, and presentations from its 2014 safety symposium can be obtained at its web site at [www.IHST.org](http://www.IHST.org) and from its Facebook page.