



**MEDCENTER AIR**

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1000 Blythe Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28203  
**MEDCENTER AIR**

# Helicopters and the Weather

*Written by: Marty Fisher, lead rotor wing pilot*

The first call helicopter EMS pilots receive before accepting a flight sounds something like this: “MedCenter pilot weather check XYZ count.” Seemingly simple, this is the first in a series of questions all EMS flights must answer before beginning. The question the pilot actually hears sounds something more like this: “How is the weather where I am located now? How is the weather where they need me to go now? What is the weather forecasted to be where I am? What is the weather forecasted to be where they need me to go? What is the weather forecast for where I need to take the patient? Will I be going to a trauma center or a burn center? Which is closest? As you can see, a seemingly simple question leads to many more all which need to be answered in a timely manner. When I began flying EMS someone said “Pilots don’t get paid to accept a flight; pilots get paid to

make the right decision to turn a flight down.” I believe this is the safety culture the industry is correctly moving towards.

Following is a chart that all EMS operators are required to function within. This is the starting point for pilots in determining whether to accept or turn down a flight. Adoption of this chart was the result of multiple weather-related EMS accidents. The chart addresses visibility and ground to cloud heights. It does not account for precipitation, wind, turbulence, trending weather conditions and any number of other weather related factors that affect a flight.

Pilots need to look at current weather and forecasted weather. They then need to use experience to make the decision about accepting a flight in either visual meteorological conditions (VMC) or the more complicated

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*MedCenter Air helicopter lands at accident site.*

**Table 1 – Weather Minimums**

AREA	Non-Mountainous		Mountainous (see 14 CFR 95)	
	Local	Cross Country	Local	Cross Country
<b>Condition</b>	<b>Ceiling Visibility</b>			
Day	800-2	800-3	800-3	1000-3
Night – Equipped with Night Vision Imaging System (NVIS) or Terrain Awareness Warning System (TAWS)	800-3	1000-3	1000-3	1000-5
Night – Without NVIS or TAWS	1000-3	1000-5	1500-3	1500-5

Note: Refer to subparagraph g for NVIS utilization

## Upcoming Events

**South Carolina Fire Association Conference**  
 June 4-9  
 Myrtle Beach, SC

**Watauga Emergency Festival**  
 June 16  
 ASU Campus

**Case Managers Society Association Conference**  
 June 19-22  
 San Francisco, CA

**EMS Night Out**  
 July 12  
 Lincolnton, NC

**South Atlantic Fire/Rescue Conference**  
 August 8-11  
 Raleigh, NC

**North Carolina Rescue Conference**  
 September 13-15  
 High Point, NC

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and planning intensive instrument meteorological conditions (IMC). Many EMS programs only have VMC options. (IMC procedures and requirements a pilot must adhere to when accepting a flight in IMC, are too in depth for the scope of this article.)



Instruments inside helicopter.

What the computer tells the pilot and what is actually occurring outside can be very different. I recently accepted a flight, (after checking my appropriate weather source) and walked outside to the aircraft only to find a thunderstorm erupting over the airport. After rechecking the weather and realizing it was a popup storm, I was able to delay the flight twenty minutes for the weather to clear.

En-route weather is a huge factor the pilot needs to consider when making a “go, no-go” decision. Weather reporting stations may be 50 to 100 miles or more apart and the weather between those stations is an unknown. A pilot’s local knowledge of an area is essential for these types of gaps in coverage. Weather can be very unpredictable. So, most aircraft are equipped for these situations. Weather radar and XM satellite weather (both of which MedCenter helicopters are equipped) can help a pilot circumnavigate weather or pick up trending conditions. This equipment is a tool to be used, giving the pilot a better idea of what to expect.

While many pilots will say “we have the weather” to accept a flight, they are really saying, “we have both the current and the forecast weather to accept a flight.” If you are the one asking for a “weather check,” be patient because it is rarely a simple “yes” or “no” answer.

## Survival Training

MedCenter Air clinical staff just wrapped up their annual survival training. The yearly exercise is mandated by the Commission on Accreditation of Medical Transport Systems standards and required by all staff. Initial didactic preparation is implemented covering pre- and post-hard landing, emergency procedures for aircraft shut down and other critical survival topics. A post written exam must be taken and passed with a 100 percent. Application of reviewed topics are implemented in a field setting, simulating real life situations. The practical portion involves traveling into a wilderness setting and demonstrating skills that include preparing a shelter, building a fire and obtaining drinking water. Another educational opportunity provided by the Blue Ridge base this year was land navigation, using way

Written by: Jason Haynes RN, CFRN, EMT-P

points and a compass.

Crew members found this year training true to life, as a thunderstorm with heavy rains occurred while crews were in the woods. Despite the adverse weather, each survival team stayed until a shelter and fire were built.



## Homeland Security Training

Written by: Greg Miller, RN

Emergency responder Angela R. Chisolm, RN, MSN, with Carolinas Medical Center, recently completed training offered by the Center for Domestic Preparedness (CDP), in Anniston, Ala. CDP is operated by the United States Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Emergency Management Agency and is the only federally-chartered Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) training facility in the nation. Also serves as the director of trauma services for Carolinas HealthCare System.

CDP develops and delivers advanced training for emergency response providers, emergency managers and other government officials from state, local and tribal governments. CDP offers more than 50 training courses focusing on incident management, mass casualty and emergency response to a catastrophic natural disaster or terrorist act. Training at the CDP campus is federally funded at no cost to state, local and tribal emergency response professionals or their agency.

Resident training at the CDP includes healthcare and public health courses at the Noble Training Facility, the nation’s only hospital dedicated to training healthcare professionals in disaster preparedness and response.

A number of resident training courses culminate at the CDP’s Chemical, Ordnance, Biological and Radiological Training Facility (COBRA). COBRA is the nation’s only facility featuring civilian training exercises in a true toxic environment using chemical agents. Advanced hands-on training enables responders to effectively prevent, respond to and recover from real-world incidents involving acts of terrorism and other hazardous materials.

Responders participating in CDP training gain critical skills and confidence to respond effectively to local incidents or potential WMD events.

Information about CDP training programs can be found at <http://cdp.dhs.gov>. For more information about CDP, contact the CDP External Affairs Office, at 256-847-2212/2316 or email [pao@cdpemail.dhs.gov](mailto:pao@cdpemail.dhs.gov).



## Travelers Come Home for Care on MedCenter Air Jets

Written by: Abby Peterson, Outreach Coordinator and Jenny VanDongen, RN, Team Leader

MedCenter Air is partnering with Birmingham-based Air Ambulance Card, LLC, to provide air ambulance transport for members who enroll through MedCenter Air. Under the partnership, members who are sick or injured 150 miles or more from home, will be flown to the hospital of their choice aboard a dedicated medical airplane. MedCenter Air will be the provider of choice for members who join under the partnership.

“We know patients want to be treated at their hometown medical center, no matter where they get sick or injured,” said Jason Schwebach, assistant vice president of Carolinas HealthCare System. “When we can send our jet and staff to pick them up and fly them home for treatment, it’s a win for us, a win for the receiving hospital and a win for the patient.” Members can enroll in the MedCenter Air partnership online at [www.AirAmbulanceCard.com/MCA](http://www.AirAmbulanceCard.com/MCA).

“Membership in Air Ambulance Card eliminates concerns about the high cost of a medical flight. International flights can cost as much as \$150,000. Members can come home to the Carolinas aboard a MedCenter Air jet and never receive a bill for the transport,” said Stan Bradley, managing director of Air Ambulance Card. Most health insurance policies will not transport patients to the hospital of their choice. Air Ambulance Card memberships are available to residents of the U.S. and Canada and cost \$195 per year for individuals and \$295 per year for families.

Air Ambulance Card provides travelers with prepaid hospital-to-hospital air ambulance service. The membership program offers services for a period of one year to families or individuals, and corporate accounts. For more information visit [AirAmbulanceCard.com/MCA](http://AirAmbulanceCard.com/MCA).

