

PRESS RELEASE

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First HHO symposium by DRF Luftrettung a success **Expert dialogue results in more safety for hoist operation**

DRF Luftrettung has held its first International Helicopter Hoist Operation (HHO) Symposium. The main conclusion from it is that significant advances in hoist operation safety can be made when operators and manufacturers exchange their practical experiences. The presentations and discussions held from 2 to 3 September 2021 at the DRF Luftrettung Operation Center brought together roughly 70 experts. They made it clear that key aspects of HHO are connected to the contrasting demands of quality standards, government requirements and everyday mission complexity. This was emphasised with impressive presentations based on practical experience, for example rescuing at high Alpine altitudes or in the Ahr Valley flood zone, as well as with a practical hoist demonstration by DRF Luftrettung.

'Safe.Hoist.Operation.' was the motto of the first International Helicopter Hoist Operation Symposium, which was held by DRF Luftrettung last week at its Operation Center at the Karlsruhe/Baden-Baden airport. How can safety be improved when using a rescue hoist? What developments are shaping the market? What new rescue techniques can benefit helicopter crews and patients? These are questions that roughly 70 pilots, technicians and trainers from Europe, North America and Australia examined as part of 15 technical presentations.

Hand in hand for safe HHO

'By holding the symposium, DRF Luftrettung has offered a platform for exchanging experience intensively. It is a platform that is so far one of a kind for Europe and it aims to further improve HHO safety,' said Dr Krystian Pracz, CEO of DRF Luftrettung, explaining the objective of the symposium, 'The dialogue that it initiates is something that is very important to us. For the benefit of all the people whose lives depend on that hoist cord during a mission, we wish to keep enhancing helicopter hoist operation hand in hand with everyone involved and build a bridge between theory and practice.'

New developments: European regulations and hoist for the five-bladed H145

Government requirements represent a key cornerstone of this bridge. The audience of specialists therefore showed great interest in hearing about the new master builder regulations for HHO in Europe which the European authority presented for the first time. The regulations are binding for both manufacturers and operators and are considered pioneering for new hoist constructions in Europe.

Innovation and enhancement represent a further cornerstone of the bridge between theory and practice. For example, they include the new hoist for the five-bladed H145. Manufacturers Airbus Helicopters, Vincorion and Collins Aerospace debuted their new hoists at the symposium. These hoists are potential candidates for approval and are planned to become available starting in January 2023. 'DRF Luftrettung is also following this development with excitement, seeing as we were the first air rescue organisation in Europe to put the five-bladed H145 into service in early January,' Dr Krystian Pracz explained.

Example missions: from Alpine rescue to flood catastrophe

The symposium built a bridge from government requirements and manufacturer developments to everyday mission practice with technical presentations. One of them, held by Mountain Rescue South Tyrol,

spoke about the stress factors that crews are confronted with during everyday missions. One of these factors, for example, is strong temperature differences – often up to 20 degrees between a helicopter station and a high-altitude Alpine destination. Are the mission crews sufficiently equipped for this and other challenges? The presenter made an appeal to operators to check their gear with this in mind. He said that optimising equipment helps to lower stress levels.

The Hesse state police's air wing held a presentation about the flood catastrophe in the Ahr Valley. It showed that the hoist is often the only means to save people's lives. An emotional silence descended upon the lecture theatre when pilot Stefan Bustert spoke about the extent of the catastrophe and the dramatic rescue of families and children, about touching human stories and about the challenges of the missions. The crucial lesson that these missions gave him was that training and standardisation are heavily important.

DRF Luftrettung, which together with its subsidiaries operates eight helicopters with hoists in Germany, Austria and Liechtenstein, provided a practical insight into its own high standards with an on-site hoist demonstration. It covered everything from the approach to the mission site, the hoist operator's move from the cockpit to the cabin during flight, the mountain rescuer's abseil down and hoisting the mountain rescuer and rescue stretcher up to the helicopter. 'With all the different presentations and concluding hoist demonstration, we have successfully stimulated a vibrant exchange with practical relevance. Based on that and the exceedingly positive feedback from participants, we wish to maintain this format in the future,' concluded Dr Krystian Pracz.

Available image material:



The roughly 70 international hoist experts use this first-ever opportunity for intensive dialogue. The topics include theoretical requirements and actual practical challenges during missions. (Source: DRF Luftrettung)



DRF Luftrettung puts its own high standards for rescue hoist missions on display at the end of the symposium with a helicopter hoist operation demonstration. (Source: DRF Luftrettung)

About DRF Luftrettung

The DRF Group is based in Filderstadt, Germany, and is one of Europe's largest air ambulance organisations. The Group carried out 39,971 call-outs in 2020. Crews are on standby around the clock at 14 of the 35 bases in Germany, Austria and Liechtenstein, with helicopters with rescue winch deployed at eight sites.

The Austrian organisation ARA Flugrettung, with two bases, has been part of the DRF Group since 2001, with Northern Helicopter GmbH – which performs air and water rescue from three bases – joining in 2019. DRF Luftrettung is also involved at a base in Balzers, Liechtenstein, via the AP³ Luftrettung network. What's more, DRF Luftrettung repatriates patients from abroad using its own ambulance aircraft.

The charitable air ambulance organisation is reliant on financial support in order to continue taking its life-saving mission from strength to strength. DRF e.V. can already count on the generosity of well over 400,000 members.

For more information, please visit www.drf-luftrettung.de

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